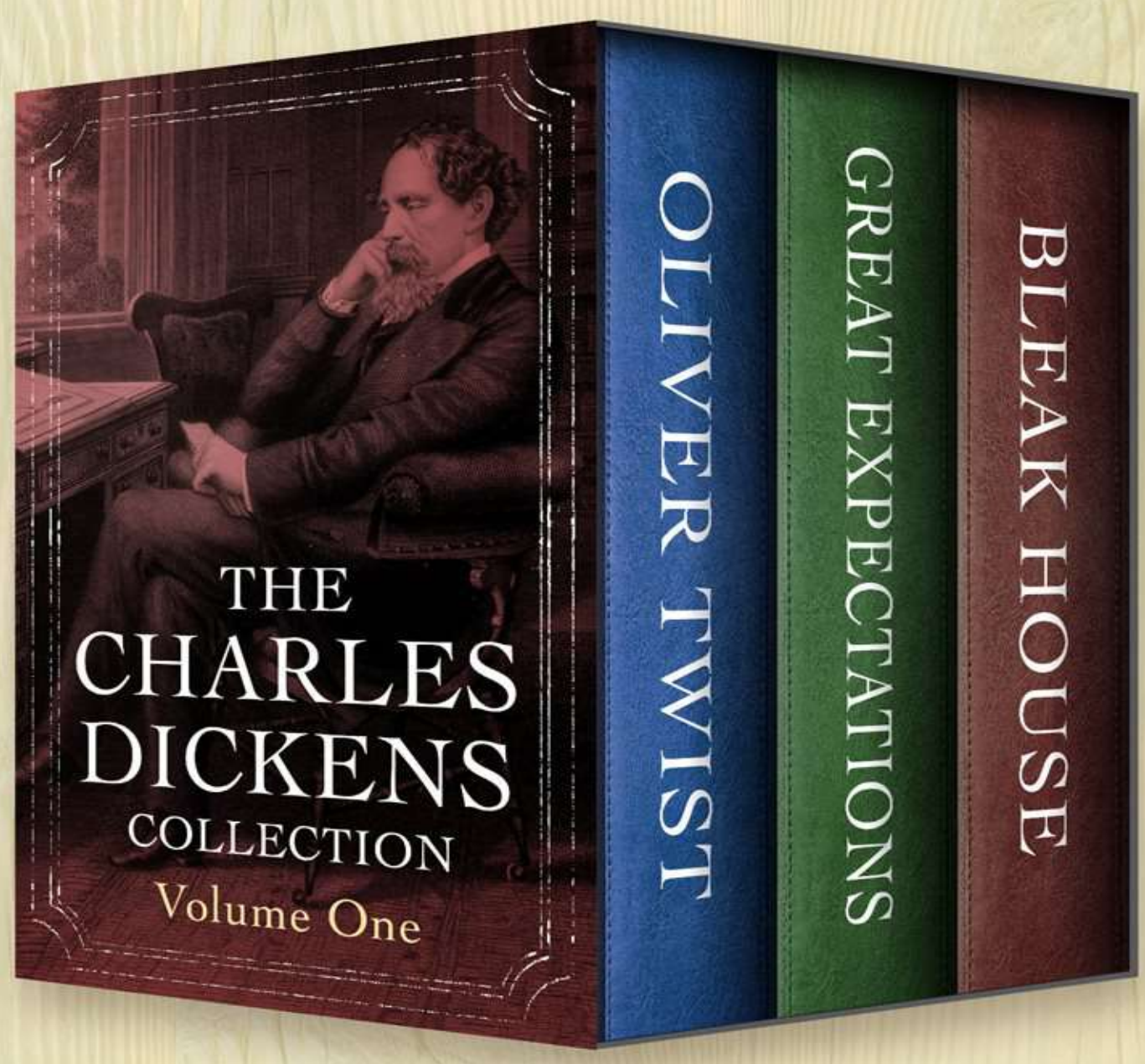
THE CHARLES DICKENS COLLECTION

Volume One



The Charles Dickens Collection Volume One

Oliver Twist, Great Expectations, and Bleak House

Charles Dickens

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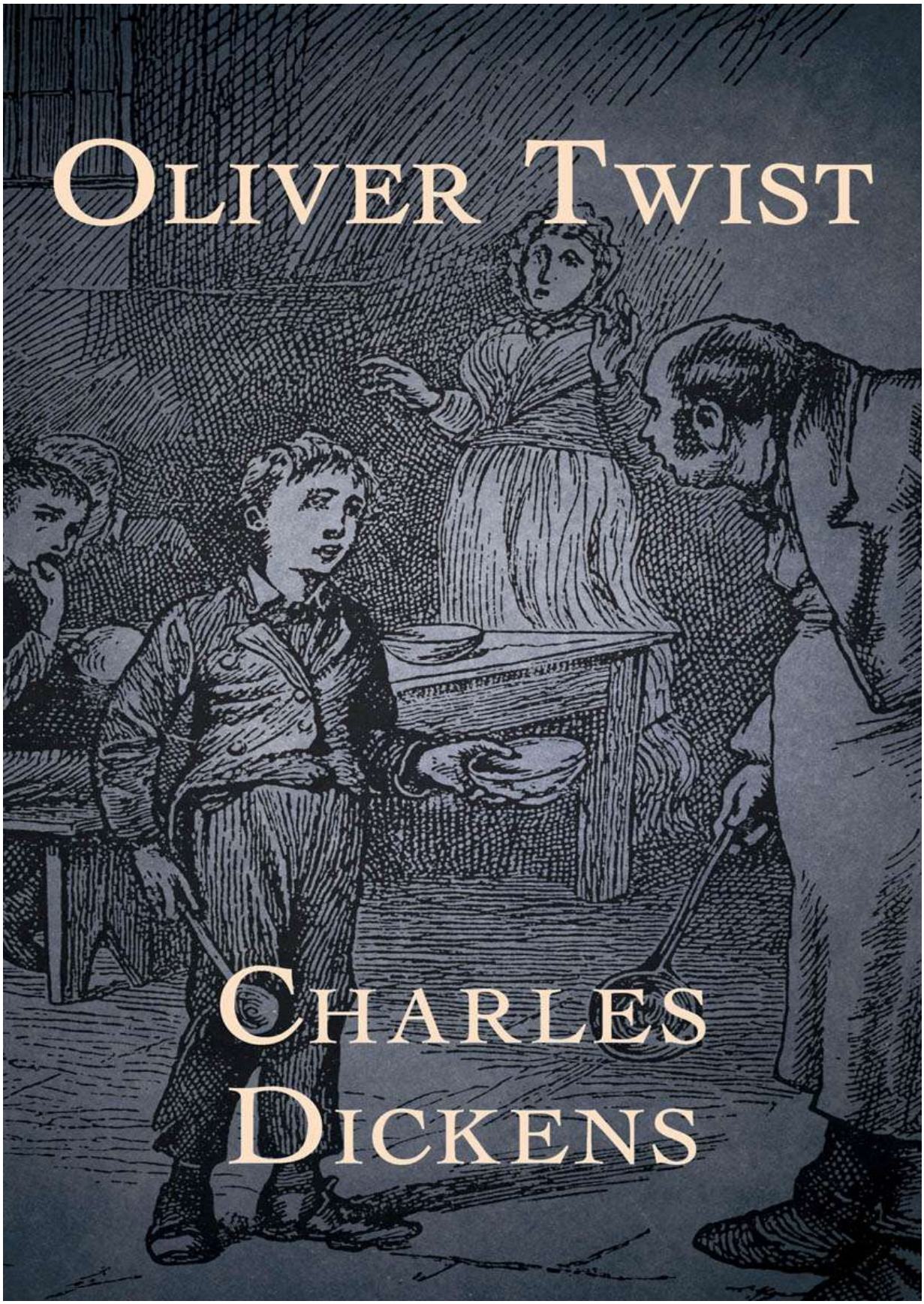
About the Author


OLIVER TWIST
CHARLES
DICKENS

Oliver Twist

CHAPTER I

AMONG OTHER PUBLIC BUILDINGS in a certain town, which for many reasons it will be prudent to refrain from mentioning, and to which I will assign no fictitious name, there is one anciently common to most towns, great or small: to wit, a workhouse; and in this workhouse was born; on a day and date which I need not trouble myself to repeat, inasmuch as it can be of no possible consequence to the reader, in this stage of the business at all events; the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head of this chapter.

For a long time after it was ushered into this world of sorrow and trouble, by the parish surgeon, it remained a matter of considerable doubt whether the child would survive to bear any name at all; in which case it is somewhat more than probable that these memoirs would never have appeared; or, if they had, that being comprised within a couple of pages, they would have possessed the inestimable merit of being the most concise and faithful specimen of biography, extant in the literature of any age or country.

Although I am not disposed to maintain that the being born in a workhouse, is in itself the most fortunate and enviable circumstance that can possibly befall a human being, I do mean to say that in this particular instance, it was the best thing for Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred. The fact is, that there was considerable difficulty in inducing Oliver to take upon himself the office of respiration,—a troublesome practice, but one which custom has rendered necessary to our easy existence; and for some time he lay gasping on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next: the balance being decidedly in favour of the latter. Now, if, during this brief period, Oliver had been surrounded by careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced

nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom, he would most inevitably and indubitably have been killed in no time. There being nobody by, however, but a pauper old woman, who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer; and a parish surgeon who did such matters by contract; Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. The result was, that, after a few struggles, Oliver breathed, sneezed, and proceeded to advertise to the inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish, by setting up as loud a cry as could reasonably have been expected from a male infant who had not been possessed of that very useful appendage, a voice, for a much longer space of time than three minutes and a quarter.

As Oliver gave this first proof of the free and proper action of his lungs, the patchwork coverlet which was carelessly flung over the iron bedstead, rustled; the pale face of a young woman was raised feebly from the pillow; and a faint voice imperfectly articulated the words, ‘Let me see the child, and die.’

The surgeon had been sitting with his face turned towards the fire: giving the palms of his hands a warm and a rub alternately. As the young woman spoke, he rose, and advancing to the bed’s head, said, with more kindness than might have been expected of him:

‘Oh, you must not talk about dying yet.’

‘Lor bless her dear heart, no!’ interposed the nurse, hastily depositing in her pocket a green glass bottle, the contents of which she had been tasting in a corner with evident satisfaction.

‘Lor bless her dear heart, when she has lived as long as I have, sir, and had thirteen children of her own, and all on ’em dead except two, and them in the wurkus with me, she’ll know better than to take on in that way, bless her dear heart! Think what it is to be a mother, there’s a dear young lamb do.’

Apparently this consolatory perspective of a mother’s prospects failed in producing its due effect. The patient shook her head, and stretched out her hand towards the child.

The surgeon deposited it in her arms. She imprinted her cold white lips passionately on its forehead; passed her hands over her face; gazed wildly round; shuddered; fell back—and died. They chafed her breast, hands, and temples; but the blood had stopped forever. They talked of hope and

comfort. They had been strangers too long.

‘It’s all over, Mrs. Thingummy!’ said the surgeon at last.

‘Ah, poor dear, so it is!’ said the nurse, picking up the cork of the green bottle, which had fallen out on the pillow, as she stooped to take up the child. ‘Poor dear!’

‘You needn’t mind sending up to me, if the child cries, nurse,’ said the surgeon, putting on his gloves with great deliberation. ‘It’s very likely it *will* be troublesome. Give it a little gruel if it is.’ He put on his hat, and, pausing by the bed-side on his way to the door, added, ‘She was a good-looking girl, too; where did she come from?’

‘She was brought here last night,’ replied the old woman, ‘by the overseer’s order. She was found lying in the street. She had walked some distance, for her shoes were worn to pieces; but where she came from, or where she was going to, nobody knows.’

The surgeon leaned over the body, and raised the left hand. ‘The old story,’ he said, shaking his head: ‘no wedding-ring, I see. Ah! Good-night!’

The medical gentleman walked away to dinner; and the nurse, having once more applied herself to the green bottle, sat down on a low chair before the fire, and proceeded to dress the infant.

What an excellent example of the power of dress, young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him his proper station in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none.

Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of church-wardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder.

CHAPTER II

FOR THE NEXT EIGHT or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception. He was brought up by hand. The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish authorities. The parish authorities inquired with dignity of the workhouse authorities, whether there was no female then domiciled in ‘the house’ who was in a situation to impart to Oliver Twist, the consolation and nourishment of which he stood in need. The workhouse authorities replied with humility, that there was not. Upon this, the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be ‘farmed,’ or, in other words, that he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week. Sevenpence-halfpenny’s worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny, quite enough to overload its stomach, and make it uncomfortable. The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. So, she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them. Thereby finding in the lowest depth a deeper still; and proving herself a very great experimental philosopher.

Everybody knows the story of another experimental philosopher who had a great theory about a horse being able to live without eating, and who demonstrated it so well, that he had got his own horse down to a straw a

day, and would unquestionably have rendered him a very spirited and rampacious animal on nothing at all, if he had not died, four-and-twenty hours before he was to have had his first comfortable bait of air. Unfortunately for, the experimental philosophy of the female to whose protecting care Oliver Twist was delivered over, a similar result usually attended the operation of *her* system; for at the very moment when the child had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either that it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got half-smothered by accident; in any one of which cases, the miserable little being was usually summoned into another world, and there gathered to the fathers it had never known in this.

Occasionally, when there was some more than usually interesting inquest upon a parish child who had been overlooked in turning up a bedstead, or inadvertently scalded to death when there happened to be a washing—though the latter accident was very scarce, anything approaching to a washing being of rare occurrence in the farm—the jury would take it into their heads to ask troublesome questions, or the parishioners would rebelliously affix their signatures to a remonstrance. But these impertinences were speedily checked by the evidence of the surgeon, and the testimony of the beadle; the former of whom had always opened the body and found nothing inside (which was very probable indeed), and the latter of whom invariably swore whatever the parish wanted; which was very self-devotional. Besides, the board made periodical pilgrimages to the farm, and always sent the beadle the day before, to say they were going. The children were neat and clean to behold, when *they* went; and what more would the people have!

It cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very extraordinary or luxuriant crop. Oliver Twist’s ninth birthday found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference. But nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver’s breast. It had had plenty of room to expand, thanks to the spare diet of the establishment; and perhaps to this circumstance may be attributed his having any ninth birth-day at all. Be this as it may, however, it was his ninth birthday; and he was keeping it in the coal-cellar with a select party of two other young gentleman, who, after participating with him in a

sound thrashing, had been locked up for atrociously presuming to be hungry, when Mrs. Mann, the good lady of the house, was unexpectedly startled by the apparition of Mr. Bumble, the beadle, striving to undo the wicket of the garden-gate.

‘Goodness gracious! Is that you, Mr. Bumble, sir?’ said Mrs. Mann, thrusting her head out of the window in well-affected ecstasies of joy. ‘(Susan, take Oliver and them two brats upstairs, and wash ’em directly.)—My heart alive! Mr. Bumble, how glad I am to see you, surely!’

Now, Mr. Bumble was a fat man, and a choleric; so, instead of responding to this open-hearted salutation in a kindred spirit, he gave the little wicket a tremendous shake, and then bestowed upon it a kick which could have emanated from no leg but a beadle’s.

‘Lor, only think,’ said Mrs. Mann, running out,—for the three boys had been removed by this time,—‘only think of that! That I should have forgotten that the gate was bolted on the inside, on account of them dear children! Walk in sir; walk in, pray, Mr. Bumble, do, sir.’

Although this invitation was accompanied with a curtsey that might have softened the heart of a church-warden, it by no means mollified the beadle.

‘Do you think this respectful or proper conduct, Mrs. Mann,’ inquired Mr. Bumble, grasping his cane, ‘to keep the parish officers a waiting at your garden-gate, when they come here upon porochial business with the porochial orphans? Are you aweer, Mrs. Mann, that you are, as I may say, a porochial delegate, and a stipendiary?’

‘I’m sure Mr. Bumble, that I was only a telling one or two of the dear children as is so fond of you, that it was you a coming,’ replied Mrs. Mann with great humility.

Mr. Bumble had a great idea of his oratorical powers and his importance. He had displayed the one, and vindicated the other. He relaxed.

‘Well, well, Mrs. Mann,’ he replied in a calmer tone; ‘it may be as you say; it may be. Lead the way in, Mrs. Mann, for I come on business, and have something to say.’

Mrs. Mann ushered the beadle into a small parlour with a brick floor; placed a seat for him; and officiously deposited his cocked hat and cane on the table before him. Mr. Bumble wiped from his forehead the perspiration which his walk had engendered, glanced complacently at the cocked hat, and smiled. Yes, he smiled. Beadles are but men: and Mr. Bumble smiled.

‘Now don’t you be offended at what I’m a going to say,’ observed Mrs. Mann, with captivating sweetness. ‘You’ve had a long walk, you know, or I wouldn’t mention it. Now, will you take a little drop of somethink, Mr. Bumble?’

‘Not a drop. Nor a drop,’ said Mr. Bumble, waving his right hand in a dignified, but placid manner.

‘I think you will,’ said Mrs. Mann, who had noticed the tone of the refusal, and the gesture that had accompanied it. ‘Just a leetle drop, with a little cold water, and a lump of sugar.’

Mr. Bumble coughed.

‘Now, just a leetle drop,’ said Mrs. Mann persuasively.

‘What is it?’ inquired the beadle.

‘Why, it’s what I’m obliged to keep a little of in the house, to put into the blessed infants’ Daffy, when they ain’t well, Mr. Bumble,’ replied Mrs. Mann as she opened a corner cupboard, and took down a bottle and glass. ‘It’s gin. I’ll not deceive you, Mr. B. It’s gin.’

‘Do you give the children Daffy, Mrs. Mann?’ inquired Bumble, following with his eyes the interesting process of mixing.

‘Ah, bless ’em, that I do, dear as it is,’ replied the nurse. ‘I couldn’t see ’em suffer before my very eyes, you know sir.’

‘No’; said Mr. Bumble approvingly; ‘no, you could not. You are a humane woman, Mrs. Mann.’ (Here she set down the glass.) ‘I shall take a early opportunity of mentioning it to the board, Mrs. Mann.’ (He drew it towards him.) ‘You feel as a mother, Mrs. Mann.’ (He stirred the gin-and-water.) ‘I—I drink your health with cheerfulness, Mrs. Mann’; and he swallowed half of it.

‘And now about business,’ said the beadle, taking out a leathern pocket-book. ‘The child that was half-baptized Oliver Twist, is nine year old to-day.’

‘Bless him!’ interposed Mrs. Mann, inflaming her left eye with the corner of her apron.

‘And notwithstanding a offered reward of ten pound, which was afterwards increased to twenty pound. Notwithstanding the most superlative, and, I may say, supernat’ral exertions on the part of this parish,’ said Bumble, ‘we have never been able to discover who is his father, or what was his mother’s settlement, name, or condition.’

Mrs. Mann raised her hands in astonishment; but added, after a moment's reflection, 'How comes he to have any name at all, then?'

The beadle drew himself up with great pride, and said, 'I inwented it.'

'You, Mr. Bumble!'

'I, Mrs. Mann. We name our fondlings in alphabetical order. The last was a S,—Swubble, I named him. This was a T,—Twist, I named *him*. The next one comes will be Unwin, and the next Vilkins. I have got names ready made to the end of the alphabet, and all the way through it again, when we come to Z.'

'Why, you're quite a literary character, sir!' said Mrs. Mann.

'Well, well,' said the beadle, evidently gratified with the compliment; 'perhaps I may be. Perhaps I may be, Mrs. Mann.' He finished the gin-and-water, and added, 'Oliver being now too old to remain here, the board have determined to have him back into the house. I have come out myself to take him there. So let me see him at once.'

'I'll fetch him directly,' said Mrs. Mann, leaving the room for that purpose. Oliver, having had by this time as much of the outer coat of dirt which encrusted his face and hands, removed, as could be scrubbed off in one washing, was led into the room by his benevolent protectress.

'Make a bow to the gentleman, Oliver,' said Mrs. Mann.

Oliver made a bow, which was divided between the beadle on the chair, and the cocked hat on the table.

'Will you go along with me, Oliver?' said Mr. Bumble, in a majestic voice.

Oliver was about to say that he would go along with anybody with great readiness, when, glancing upward, he caught sight of Mrs. Mann, who had got behind the beadle's chair, and was shaking her fist at him with a furious countenance. He took the hint at once, for the fist had been too often impressed upon his body not to be deeply impressed upon his recollection.

'Will she go with me?' inquired poor Oliver.

'No, she can't,' replied Mr. Bumble. 'But she'll come and see you sometimes.'

This was no very great consolation to the child. Young as he was, however, he had sense enough to make a feint of feeling great regret at going away. It was no very difficult matter for the boy to call tears into his eyes. Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if you want to cry; and

Oliver cried very naturally indeed. Mrs. Mann gave him a thousand embraces, and what Oliver wanted a great deal more, a piece of bread and butter, less he should seem too hungry when he got to the workhouse. With the slice of bread in his hand, and the little brown-cloth parish cap on his head, Oliver was then led away by Mr. Bumble from the wretched home where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years. And yet he burst into an agony of childish grief, as the cottage-gate closed after him. Wretched as were the little companions in misery he was leaving behind, they were the only friends he had ever known; and a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world, sank into the child's heart for the first time.

Mr. Bumble walked on with long strides; little Oliver, firmly grasping his gold-laced cuff, trotted beside him, inquiring at the end of every quarter of a mile whether they were 'nearly there.' To these interrogations Mr. Bumble returned very brief and snappish replies; for the temporary blandness which gin-and-water awakens in some bosoms had by this time evaporated; and he was once again a beadle.

Oliver had not been within the walls of the workhouse a quarter of an hour, and had scarcely completed the demolition of a second slice of bread, when Mr. Bumble, who had handed him over to the care of an old woman, returned; and, telling him it was a board night, informed him that the board had said he was to appear before it forthwith.

Not having a very clearly defined notion of what a live board was, Oliver was rather astounded by this intelligence, and was not quite certain whether he ought to laugh or cry. He had no time to think about the matter, however; for Mr. Bumble gave him a tap on the head, with his cane, to wake him up: and another on the back to make him lively: and bidding him to follow, conducted him into a large white-washed room, where eight or ten fat gentlemen were sitting round a table. At the top of the table, seated in an arm-chair rather higher than the rest, was a particularly fat gentleman with a very round, red face.

'Bow to the board,' said Bumble. Oliver brushed away two or three tears that were lingering in his eyes; and seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowed to that.

'What's your name, boy?' said the gentleman in the high chair.

Oliver was frightened at the sight of so many gentlemen, which made

him tremble: and the beadle gave him another tap behind, which made him cry. These two causes made him answer in a very low and hesitating voice; whereupon a gentleman in a white waistcoat said he was a fool. Which was a capital way of raising his spirits, and putting him quite at his ease.

‘Boy,’ said the gentleman in the high chair, ‘listen to me. You know you’re an orphan, I suppose?’

‘What’s that, sir?’ inquired poor Oliver.

‘The boy *is* a fool—I thought he was,’ said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

‘Hush!’ said the gentleman who had spoken first. ‘You know you’ve got no father or mother, and that you were brought up by the parish, don’t you?’

‘Yes, sir,’ replied Oliver, weeping bitterly.

‘What are you crying for?’ inquired the gentleman in the white waistcoat. And to be sure it was very extraordinary. What *could* the boy be crying for?

‘I hope you say your prayers every night,’ said another gentleman in a gruff voice; ‘and pray for the people who feed you, and take care of you—like a Christian.’

‘Yes, sir,’ stammered the boy. The gentleman who spoke last was unconsciously right. It would have been very like a Christian, and a marvellously good Christian too, if Oliver had prayed for the people who fed and took care of *him*. But he hadn’t, because nobody had taught him.

‘Well! You have come here to be educated, and taught a useful trade,’ said the red-faced gentleman in the high chair.

‘So you’ll begin to pick oakum to-morrow morning at six o’clock,’ added the surly one in the white waistcoat.

For the combination of both these blessings in the one simple process of picking oakum, Oliver bowed low by the direction of the beadle, and was then hurried away to a large ward; where, on a rough, hard bed, he sobbed himself to sleep. What a novel illustration of the tender laws of England! They let the paupers go to sleep!

Poor Oliver! He little thought, as he lay sleeping in happy unconsciousness of all around him, that the board had that very day arrived at a decision which would exercise the most material influence over all his future fortunes. But they had. And this was it:

The members of this board were very sage, deep, philosophical men; and

when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have discovered—the poor people liked it! It was a regular place of public entertainment for the poorer classes; a tavern where there was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper all the year round; a brick and mortar elysium, where it was all play and no work. ‘Oho!’ said the board, looking very knowing; ‘we are the fellows to set this to rights; we’ll stop it all, in no time.’ So, they established the rule, that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they), of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the water-works to lay on an unlimited supply of water; and with a corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal; and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll of Sundays. They made a great many other wise and humane regulations, having reference to the ladies, which it is not necessary to repeat; kindly undertook to divorce poor married people, in consequence of the great expense of a suit in Doctors’ Commons; and, instead of compelling a man to support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor! There is no saying how many applicants for relief, under these last two heads, might have started up in all classes of society, if it had not been coupled with the workhouse; but the board were long-headed men, and had provided for this difficulty. The relief was inseparable from the workhouse and the gruel; and that frightened people.

For the first six months after Oliver Twist was removed, the system was in full operation. It was rather expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in the undertaker’s bill, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers, which fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week or two’s gruel. But the number of workhouse inmates got thin as well as the paupers; and the board were in ecstasies.

The room in which the boys were fed, was a large stone hall, with a copper at one end: out of which the master, dressed in an apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled the gruel at mealtimes. Of this festive composition each boy had one porringer, and no more—except on occasions of great public rejoicing, when he had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides.

The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. Boys have generally excellent appetites. Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months: at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, that one boy, who was tall for his age, and hadn't been used to that sort of thing (for his father had kept a small cook-shop), hinted darkly to his companions, that unless he had another basin of gruel per diem, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye; and they implicitly believed him. A council was held; lots were cast who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel was served out; and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered each other, and winked at Oliver; while his next neighbors nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity:

'Please, sir, I want some more.'

The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.

'What!' said the master at length, in a faint voice.

'Please, sir,' replied Oliver, 'I want some more.'

The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle.

The board were sitting in solemn conclave, when Mr. Bumble rushed into the room in great excitement, and addressing the gentleman in the high

chair, said,

‘Mr. Limbkins, I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!’

There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every countenance.

‘For *more*!’ said Mr. Limbkins. ‘Compose yourself, Bumble, and answer me distinctly. Do I understand that he asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary?’

‘He did, sir,’ replied Bumble.

‘That boy will be hung,’ said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. ‘I know that boy will be hung.’

Nobody controverted the prophetic gentleman’s opinion. An animated discussion took place. Oliver was ordered into instant confinement; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. In other words, five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling.

‘I never was more convinced of anything in my life,’ said the gentleman in the white waistcoat, as he knocked at the gate and read the bill next morning: ‘I never was more convinced of anything in my life, than I am that that boy will come to be hung.’

As I purpose to show in the sequel whether the white waistcoated gentleman was right or not, I should perhaps mar the interest of this narrative (supposing it to possess any at all), if I ventured to hint just yet, whether the life of Oliver Twist had this violent termination or no.

CHAPTER III

FOR A WEEK AFTER the commission of the impious and profane offence of asking for more, Oliver remained a close prisoner in the dark and solitary room to which he had been consigned by the wisdom and mercy of the board. It appears, at first sight not unreasonable to suppose, that, if he had entertained a becoming feeling of respect for the prediction of the gentleman in the white waistcoat, he would have established that sage individual's prophetic character, once and for ever, by tying one end of his pocket-handkerchief to a hook in the wall, and attaching himself to the other. To the performance of this feat, however, there was one obstacle: namely, that pocket-handkerchiefs being decided articles of luxury, had been, for all future times and ages, removed from the noses of paupers by the express order of the board, in council assembled: solemnly given and pronounced under their hands and seals. There was a still greater obstacle in Oliver's youth and childishness. He only cried bitterly all day; and, when the long, dismal night came on, spread his little hands before his eyes to shut out the darkness, and crouching in the corner, tried to sleep: ever and anon waking with a start and tremble, and drawing himself closer and closer to the wall, as if to feel even its cold hard surface were a protection in the gloom and loneliness which surrounded him.

Let it not be supposed by the enemies of 'the system,' that, during the period of his solitary incarceration, Oliver was denied the benefit of exercise, the pleasure of society, or the advantages of religious consolation. As for exercise, it was nice cold weather, and he was allowed to perform his ablutions every morning under the pump, in a stone yard, in the presence of Mr. Bumble, who prevented his catching cold, and caused a tingling sensation to pervade his frame, by repeated applications of the cane. As for society, he was carried every other day into the hall where the boys dined,

and there sociably flogged as a public warning and example. And so far from being denied the advantages of religious consolation, he was kicked into the same apartment every evening at prayer-time, and there permitted to listen to, and console his mind with, a general supplication of the boys, containing a special clause, therein inserted by authority of the board, in which they entreated to be made good, virtuous, contented, and obedient, and to be guarded from the sins and vices of Oliver Twist: whom the supplication distinctly set forth to be under the exclusive patronage and protection of the powers of wickedness, and an article direct from the manufactory of the very Devil himself.

It chanced one morning, while Oliver's affairs were in this auspicious and comfortable state, that Mr. Gamfield, chimney-sweep, went his way down the High Street, deeply cogitating in his mind his ways and means of paying certain arrears of rent, for which his landlord had become rather pressing. Mr. Gamfield's most sanguine estimate of his finances could not raise them within full five pounds of the desired amount; and, in a species of arithmetical desperation, he was alternately cudgelling his brains and his donkey, when passing the workhouse, his eyes encountered the bill on the gate.

'Wo—o!' said Mr. Gamfield to the donkey.

The donkey was in a state of profound abstraction: wondering, probably, whether he was destined to be regaled with a cabbage-stalk or two when he had disposed of the two sacks of soot with which the little cart was laden; so, without noticing the word of command, he jogged onward.

Mr. Gamfield growled a fierce imprecation on the donkey generally, but more particularly on his eyes; and, running after him, bestowed a blow on his head, which would inevitably have beaten in any skull but a donkey's. Then, catching hold of the bridle, he gave his jaw a sharp wrench, by way of gentle reminder that he was not his own master; and by these means turned him round. He then gave him another blow on the head, just to stun him till he came back again. Having completed these arrangements, he walked up to the gate, to read the bill.

The gentleman with the white waistcoat was standing at the gate with his hands behind him, after having delivered himself of some profound sentiments in the board-room. Having witnessed the little dispute between Mr. Gamfield and the donkey, he smiled joyously when that person came up

to read the bill, for he saw at once that Mr. Gamfield was exactly the sort of master Oliver Twist wanted. Mr. Gamfield smiled, too, as he perused the document; for five pounds was just the sum he had been wishing for; and, as to the boy with which it was encumbered, Mr. Gamfield, knowing what the dietary of the workhouse was, well knew he would be a nice small pattern, just the very thing for register stoves. So, he spelt the bill through again, from beginning to end; and then, touching his fur cap in token of humility, accosted the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

‘This here boy, sir, wot the parish wants to ’prentis,’ said Mr. Gamfield.

‘Ay, my man,’ said the gentleman in the white waistcoat, with a condescending smile. ‘What of him?’

‘If the parish vould like him to learn a right pleasant trade, in a good ’spectable chimbley-sweepin’ bisness,’ said Mr. Gamfield, ‘I wants a ’prentis, and I am ready to take him.’

‘Walk in,’ said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. Mr. Gamfield having lingered behind, to give the donkey another blow on the head, and another wrench of the jaw, as a caution not to run away in his absence, followed the gentleman with the white waistcoat into the room where Oliver had first seen him.

‘It’s a nasty trade,’ said Mr. Limbkins, when Gamfield had again stated his wish.

‘Young boys have been smothered in chimneys before now,’ said another gentleman.

‘That’s acause they damped the straw afore they lit it in the chimbley to make ’em come down again,’ said Gamfield; ‘that’s all smoke, and no blaze; vereas smoke ain’t o’ no use at all in making a boy come down, for it only sinds him to sleep, and that’s wot he likes. Boys is wery obstinit, and wery lazy, Gen’l’men, and there’s nothink like a good hot blaze to make ’em come down vith a run. It’s humane too, gen’l’men, acause, even if they’ve stuck in the chimbley, roasting their feet makes ’em struggle to hextricate theirselves.’

The gentleman in the white waistcoat appeared very much amused by this explanation; but his mirth was speedily checked by a look from Mr. Limbkins. The board then proceeded to converse among themselves for a few minutes, but in so low a tone, that the words ‘saving of expenditure,’ ‘looked well in the accounts,’ ‘have a printed report published,’ were alone

audible. These only chanced to be heard, indeed, or account of their being very frequently repeated with great emphasis.

At length the whispering ceased; and the members of the board, having resumed their seats and their solemnity, Mr. Limbkins said:

‘We have considered your proposition, and we don’t approve of it.’

‘Not at all,’ said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

‘Decidedly not,’ added the other members.

As Mr. Gamfield did happen to labour under the slight imputation of having bruised three or four boys to death already, it occurred to him that the board had, perhaps, in some unaccountable freak, taken it into their heads that this extraneous circumstance ought to influence their proceedings. It was very unlike their general mode of doing business, if they had; but still, as he had no particular wish to revive the rumour, he twisted his cap in his hands, and walked slowly from the table.

‘So you won’t let me have him, gen’l’men?’ said Mr. Gamfield, pausing near the door.

‘No,’ replied Mr. Limbkins; ‘at least, as it’s a nasty business, we think you ought to take something less than the premium we offered.’

Mr. Gamfield’s countenance brightened, as, with a quick step, he returned to the table, and said,

‘What’ll you give, gen’l’men? Come! Don’t be too hard on a poor man. What’ll you give?’

‘I should say, three pound ten was plenty,’ said Mr. Limbkins.

‘Ten shillings too much,’ said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

‘Come!’ said Gamfield; ‘say four pound, gen’l’men. Say four pound, and you’ve got rid of him for good and all. There!’

‘Three pound ten,’ repeated Mr. Limbkins, firmly.

‘Come! I’ll split the diff’erence, gen’l’men,’ urged Gamfield. ‘Three pound fifteen.’

‘Not a farthing more,’ was the firm reply of Mr. Limbkins.

‘You’re desperate hard upon me, gen’l’men,’ said Gamfield, wavering.

‘Pooh! pooh! nonsense!’ said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. ‘He’d be cheap with nothing at all, as a premium. Take him, you silly fellow! He’s just the boy for you. He wants the stick, now and then: it’ll do him good; and his board needn’t come very expensive, for he hasn’t been overfed since he was born. Ha! ha! ha!’

Mr. Gamfield gave an arch look at the faces round the table, and, observing a smile on all of them, gradually broke into a smile himself. The bargain was made. Mr. Bumble, was at once instructed that Oliver Twist and his indentures were to be conveyed before the magistrate, for signature and approval, that very afternoon.

In pursuance of this determination, little Oliver, to his excessive astonishment, was released from bondage, and ordered to put himself into a clean shirt. He had hardly achieved this very unusual gymnastic performance, when Mr. Bumble brought him, with his own hands, a basin of gruel, and the holiday allowance of two ounces and a quarter of bread. At this tremendous sight, Oliver began to cry very piteously: thinking, not unnaturally, that the board must have determined to kill him for some useful purpose, or they never would have begun to fatten him up in that way.

‘Don’t make your eyes red, Oliver, but eat your food and be thankful,’ said Mr. Bumble, in a tone of impressive pomposity. ‘You’re a going to be made a ’prentice of, Oliver.’

‘A prentice, sir!’ said the child, trembling.

‘Yes, Oliver,’ said Mr. Bumble. ‘The kind and blessed gentleman which is so many parents to you, Oliver, when you have none of your own: are a going to ‘’prentice’ you: and to set you up in life, and make a man of you: although the expense to the parish is three pound ten!—three pound ten, Oliver!—seventy shillins—one hundred and forty sixpences!—and all for a naughty orphan which nobody can’t love.’

As Mr. Bumble paused to take breath, after delivering this address in an awful voice, the tears rolled down the poor child’s face, and he sobbed bitterly.

‘Come,’ said Mr. Bumble, somewhat less pompously, for it was gratifying to his feelings to observe the effect his eloquence had produced; ‘Come, Oliver! Wipe your eyes with the cuffs of your jacket, and don’t cry into your gruel; that’s a very foolish action, Oliver.’ It certainly was, for there was quite enough water in it already.

On their way to the magistrate, Mr. Bumble instructed Oliver that all he would have to do, would be to look very happy, and say, when the gentleman asked him if he wanted to be apprenticed, that he should like it very much indeed; both of which injunctions Oliver promised to obey: the rather as Mr. Bumble threw in a gentle hint, that if he failed in either

particular, there was no telling what would be done to him. When they arrived at the office, he was shut up in a little room by himself, and admonished by Mr. Bumble to stay there, until he came back to fetch him.

There the boy remained, with a palpitating heart, for half an hour. At the expiration of which time Mr. Bumble thrust in his head, unadorned with the cocked hat, and said aloud:

‘Now, Oliver, my dear, come to the gentleman.’ As Mr. Bumble said this, he put on a grim and threatening look, and added, in a low voice, ‘Mind what I told you, you young rascal!’

Oliver stared innocently in Mr. Bumble’s face at this somewhat contradictory style of address; but that gentleman prevented his offering any remark thereupon, by leading him at once into an adjoining room: the door of which was open. It was a large room, with a great window. Behind a desk, sat two old gentleman with powdered heads: one of whom was reading the newspaper; while the other was perusing, with the aid of a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles, a small piece of parchment which lay before him. Mr. Limbkins was standing in front of the desk on one side; and Mr. Gamfield, with a partially washed face, on the other; while two or three bluff-looking men, in top-boots, were lounging about.

The old gentleman with the spectacles gradually dozed off, over the little bit of parchment; and there was a short pause, after Oliver had been stationed by Mr. Bumble in front of the desk.

‘This is the boy, your worship,’ said Mr. Bumble.

The old gentleman who was reading the newspaper raised his head for a moment, and pulled the other old gentleman by the sleeve; whereupon, the last-mentioned old gentleman woke up.

‘Oh, is this the boy?’ said the old gentleman.

‘This is him, sir,’ replied Mr. Bumble. ‘Bow to the magistrate, my dear.’

Oliver roused himself, and made his best obeisance. He had been wondering, with his eyes fixed on the magistrates’ powder, whether all boards were born with that white stuff on their heads, and were boards from thenceforth on that account.

‘Well,’ said the old gentleman, ‘I suppose he’s fond of chimney-sweeping?’

‘He doats on it, your worship,’ replied Bumble; giving Oliver a sly pinch, to intimate that he had better not say he didn’t.

‘And he *will* be a sweep, will he?’ inquired the old gentleman.

‘If we was to bind him to any other trade to-morrow, he’d run away simultaneous, your worship,’ replied Bumble.

‘And this man that’s to be his master—you, sir—you’ll treat him well, and feed him, and do all that sort of thing, will you?’ said the old gentleman.

‘When I says I will, I means I will,’ replied Mr. Gamfield doggedly.

‘You’re a rough speaker, my friend, but you look an honest, open-hearted man,’ said the old gentleman: turning his spectacles in the direction of the candidate for Oliver’s premium, whose villainous countenance was a regular stamped receipt for cruelty. But the magistrate was half blind and half childish, so he couldn’t reasonably be expected to discern what other people did.

‘I hope I am, sir,’ said Mr. Gamfield, with an ugly leer.

‘I have no doubt you are, my friend,’ replied the old gentleman: fixing his spectacles more firmly on his nose, and looking about him for the inkstand.

It was the critical moment of Oliver’s fate. If the inkstand had been where the old gentleman thought it was, he would have dipped his pen into it, and signed the indentures, and Oliver would have been straightway hurried off. But, as it chanced to be immediately under his nose, it followed, as a matter of course, that he looked all over his desk for it, without finding it; and happening in the course of his search to look straight before him, his gaze encountered the pale and terrified face of Oliver Twist: who, despite all the admonitory looks and pinches of Bumble, was regarding the repulsive countenance of his future master, with a mingled expression of horror and fear, too palpable to be mistaken, even by a half-blind magistrate.

The old gentleman stopped, laid down his pen, and looked from Oliver to Mr. Limbkins; who attempted to take snuff with a cheerful and unconcerned aspect.

‘My boy!’ said the old gentleman, ‘you look pale and alarmed. What is the matter?’

‘Stand a little away from him, Beadle,’ said the other magistrate: laying aside the paper, and leaning forward with an expression of interest. ‘Now, boy, tell us what’s the matter: don’t be afraid.’

Oliver fell on his knees, and clasping his hands together, prayed that they would order him back to the dark room—that they would starve him—beat him—kill him if they pleased—rather than send him away with that dreadful man.

‘Well!’ said Mr. Bumble, raising his hands and eyes with most impressive solemnity. ‘Well! of all the artful and designing orphans that ever I see, Oliver, you are one of the most bare-facedest.’

‘Hold your tongue, Beadle,’ said the second old gentleman, when Mr. Bumble had given vent to this compound adjective.

‘I beg your worship’s pardon,’ said Mr. Bumble, incredulous of having heard aright. ‘Did your worship speak to me?’

‘Yes. Hold your tongue.’

Mr. Bumble was stupefied with astonishment. A beadle ordered to hold his tongue! A moral revolution!

The old gentleman in the tortoise-shell spectacles looked at his companion, he nodded significantly.

‘We refuse to sanction these indentures,’ said the old gentleman: tossing aside the piece of parchment as he spoke.

‘I hope,’ stammered Mr. Limbkins: ‘I hope the magistrates will not form the opinion that the authorities have been guilty of any improper conduct, on the unsupported testimony of a child.’

‘The magistrates are not called upon to pronounce any opinion on the matter,’ said the second old gentleman sharply. ‘Take the boy back to the workhouse, and treat him kindly. He seems to want it.’

That same evening, the gentleman in the white waistcoat most positively and decidedly affirmed, not only that Oliver would be hung, but that he would be drawn and quartered into the bargain. Mr. Bumble shook his head with gloomy mystery, and said he wished he might come to good; whereunto Mr. Gamfield replied, that he wished he might come to him; which, although he agreed with the beadle in most matters, would seem to be a wish of a totally opposite description.

The next morning, the public were once informed that Oliver Twist was again To Let, and that five pounds would be paid to anybody who would take possession of him.

CHAPTER IV

IN GREAT FAMILIES, WHEN an advantageous place cannot be obtained, either in possession, reversion, remainder, or expectancy, for the young man who is growing up, it is a very general custom to send him to sea. The board, in imitation of so wise and salutary an example, took counsel together on the expediency of shipping off Oliver Twist, in some small trading vessel bound to a good unhealthy port. This suggested itself as the very best thing that could possibly be done with him: the probability being, that the skipper would flog him to death, in a playful mood, some day after dinner, or would knock his brains out with an iron bar; both pastimes being, as is pretty generally known, very favourite and common recreations among gentleman of that class. The more the case presented itself to the board, in this point of view, the more manifold the advantages of the step appeared; so, they came to the conclusion that the only way of providing for Oliver effectually, was to send him to sea without delay.

Mr. Bumble had been despatched to make various preliminary inquiries, with the view of finding out some captain or other who wanted a cabin-boy without any friends; and was returning to the workhouse to communicate the result of his mission; when he encountered at the gate, no less a person than Mr. Sowerberry, the parochial undertaker.

Mr. Sowerberry was a tall gaunt, large-jointed man, attired in a suit of threadbare black, with darned cotton stockings of the same colour, and shoes to answer. His features were not naturally intended to wear a smiling aspect, but he was in general rather given to professional jocosity. His step was elastic, and his face betokened inward pleasantry, as he advanced to Mr. Bumble, and shook him cordially by the hand.

‘I have taken the measure of the two women that died last night, Mr. Bumble,’ said the undertaker.

‘You’ll make your fortune, Mr. Sowerberry,’ said the beadle, as he thrust his thumb and forefinger into the proffered snuff-box of the undertaker: which was an ingenious little model of a patent coffin. ‘I say you’ll make your fortune, Mr. Sowerberry,’ repeated Mr. Bumble, tapping the undertaker on the shoulder, in a friendly manner, with his cane.

‘Think so?’ said the undertaker in a tone which half admitted and half disputed the probability of the event. ‘The prices allowed by the board are very small, Mr. Bumble.’

‘So are the coffins,’ replied the beadle: with precisely as near an approach to a laugh as a great official ought to indulge in.

Mr. Sowerberry was much tickled at this: as of course he ought to be; and laughed a long time without cessation. ‘Well, well, Mr. Bumble,’ he said at length, ‘there’s no denying that, since the new system of feeding has come in, the coffins are something narrower and more shallow than they used to be; but we must have some profit, Mr. Bumble. Well-seasoned timber is an expensive article, sir; and all the iron handles come, by canal, from Birmingham.’

‘Well, well,’ said Mr. Bumble, ‘every trade has its drawbacks. A fair profit is, of course, allowable.’

‘Of course, of course,’ replied the undertaker; ‘and if I don’t get a profit upon this or that particular article, why, I make it up in the long-run, you see—he! he! he!’

‘Just so,’ said Mr. Bumble.

‘Though I must say,’ continued the undertaker, resuming the current of observations which the beadle had interrupted: ‘though I must say, Mr. Bumble, that I have to contend against one very great disadvantage: which is, that all the stout people go off the quickest. The people who have been better off, and have paid rates for many years, are the first to sink when they come into the house; and let me tell you, Mr. Bumble, that three or four inches over one’s calculation makes a great hole in one’s profits: especially when one has a family to provide for, sir.’

As Mr. Sowerberry said this, with the becoming indignation of an ill-used man; and as Mr. Bumble felt that it rather tended to convey a reflection on the honour of the parish; the latter gentleman thought it advisable to change the subject. Oliver Twist being uppermost in his mind, he made him his theme.

‘By the bye,’ said Mr. Bumble, ‘you don’t know anybody who wants a boy, do you? A porochial ’prentis, who is at present a dead-weight; a millstone, as I may say, round the porochial throat? Liberal terms, Mr. Sowerberry, liberal terms?’ As Mr. Bumble spoke, he raised his cane to the bill above him, and gave three distinct raps upon the words ‘five pounds’: which were printed thereon in Roman capitals of gigantic size.

‘Gadso!’ said the undertaker: taking Mr. Bumble by the gilt-edged lappel of his official coat; ‘that’s just the very thing I wanted to speak to you about. You know—dear me, what a very elegant button this is, Mr. Bumble! I never noticed it before.’

‘Yes, I think it rather pretty,’ said the beadle, glancing proudly downwards at the large brass buttons which embellished his coat. ‘The die is the same as the porochial seal—the Good Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man. The board presented it to me on Newyear’s morning, Mr. Sowerberry. I put it on, I remember, for the first time, to attend the inquest on that reduced tradesman, who died in a doorway at midnight.’

‘I recollect,’ said the undertaker. ‘The jury brought it in, “Died from exposure to the cold, and want of the common necessaries of life,” didn’t they?’

Mr. Bumble nodded.

‘And they made it a special verdict, I think,’ said the undertaker, ‘by adding some words to the effect, that if the relieving officer had—’

‘Tush! Foolery!’ interposed the beadle. ‘If the board attended to all the nonsense that ignorant jurymen talk, they’d have enough to do.’

‘Very true,’ said the undertaker; ‘they would indeed.’

‘Juries,’ said Mr. Bumble, grasping his cane tightly, as was his wont when working into a passion: ‘juries is ineddicated, vulgar, grovelling wretches.’

‘So they are,’ said the undertaker.

‘They haven’t no more philosophy nor political economy about ’em than that,’ said the beadle, snapping his fingers contemptuously.

‘No more they have,’ acquiesced the undertaker.

‘I despise ’em,’ said the beadle, growing very red in the face.

‘So do I,’ rejoined the undertaker.

‘And I only wish we’d a jury of the independent sort, in the house for a week or two,’ said the beadle; ‘the rules and regulations of the board would

soon bring their spirit down for ’em.’

‘Let ’em alone for that,’ replied the undertaker. So saying, he smiled, approvingly: to calm the rising wrath of the indignant parish officer.

Mr. Bumble lifted off his cocked hat; took a handkerchief from the inside of the crown; wiped from his forehead the perspiration which his rage had engendered; fixed the cocked hat on again; and, turning to the undertaker, said in a calmer voice:

‘Well; what about the boy?’

‘Oh!’ replied the undertaker; ‘why, you know, Mr. Bumble, I pay a good deal towards the poor’s rates.’

‘Hem!’ said Mr. Bumble. ‘Well?’

‘Well,’ replied the undertaker, ‘I was thinking that if I pay so much towards ’em, I’ve a right to get as much out of ’em as I can, Mr. Bumble; and so—I think I’ll take the boy myself.’

Mr. Bumble grasped the undertaker by the arm, and led him into the building. Mr. Sowerberry was closeted with the board for five minutes; and it was arranged that Oliver should go to him that evening ‘upon liking’—a phrase which means, in the case of a parish apprentice, that if the master find, upon a short trial, that he can get enough work out of a boy without putting too much food into him, he shall have him for a term of years, to do what he likes with.

When little Oliver was taken before ‘the gentlemen’ that evening; and informed that he was to go, that night, as general house-lad to a coffin-maker’s; and that if he complained of his situation, or ever came back to the parish again, he would be sent to sea, there to be drowned, or knocked on the head, as the case might be, he evinced so little emotion, that they by common consent pronounced him a hardened young rascal, and ordered Mr. Bumble to remove him forthwith.

Now, although it was very natural that the board, of all people in the world, should feel in a great state of virtuous astonishment and horror at the smallest tokens of want of feeling on the part of anybody, they were rather out, in this particular instance. The simple fact was, that Oliver, instead of possessing too little feeling, possessed rather too much; and was in a fair way of being reduced, for life, to a state of brutal stupidity and sullenness by the ill usage he had received. He heard the news of his destination, in perfect silence; and, having had his luggage put into his hand—which was

not very difficult to carry, inasmuch as it was all comprised within the limits of a brown paper parcel, about half a foot square by three inches deep—he pulled his cap over his eyes; and once more attaching himself to Mr. Bumble's coat cuff, was led away by that dignitary to a new scene of suffering.

For some time, Mr. Bumble drew Oliver along, without notice or remark; for the beadle carried his head very erect, as a beadle always should: and, it being a windy day, little Oliver was completely enshrouded by the skirts of Mr. Bumble's coat as they blew open, and disclosed to great advantage his flapped waistcoat and drab plush knee-breeches. As they drew near to their destination, however, Mr. Bumble thought it expedient to look down, and see that the boy was in good order for inspection by his new master: which he accordingly did, with a fit and becoming air of gracious patronage.

'Oliver!' said Mr. Bumble.

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver, in a low, tremulous voice.

'Pull that cap off your eyes, and hold up your head, sir.'

Although Oliver did as he was desired, at once; and passed the back of his unoccupied hand briskly across his eyes, he left a tear in them when he looked up at his conductor. As Mr. Bumble gazed sternly upon him, it rolled down his cheek. It was followed by another, and another. The child made a strong effort, but it was an unsuccessful one. Withdrawing his other hand from Mr. Bumble's he covered his face with both; and wept until the tears sprung out from between his chin and bony fingers.

'Well!' exclaimed Mr. Bumble, stopping short, and darting at his little charge a look of intense malignity. 'Well! Of *all* the ungratefullest, and worst-disposed boys as ever I see, Oliver, you are the—'

'No, no, sir,' sobbed Oliver, clinging to the hand which held the well-known cane; 'no, no, sir; I will be good indeed; indeed, indeed I will, sir! I am a very little boy, sir; and it is so—so—'

'So what?' inquired Mr. Bumble in amazement.

'So lonely, sir! So very lonely!' cried the child. 'Everybody hates me. Oh! sir, don't, don't pray be cross to me!' The child beat his hand upon his heart; and looked in his companion's face, with tears of real agony.

Mr. Bumble regarded Oliver's piteous and helpless look, with some astonishment, for a few seconds; hemmed three or four times in a husky manner; and after muttering something about 'that troublesome cough,'

bade Oliver dry his eyes and be a good boy. Then once more taking his hand, he walked on with him in silence.

The undertaker, who had just put up the shutters of his shop, was making some entries in his day-book by the light of a most appropriate dismal candle, when Mr. Bumble entered.

‘Aha!’ said the undertaker; looking up from the book, and pausing in the middle of a word; ‘is that you, Bumble?’

‘No one else, Mr. Sowerberry,’ replied the beadle. ‘Here! I’ve brought the boy.’ Oliver made a bow.

‘Oh! that’s the boy, is it?’ said the undertaker: raising the candle above his head, to get a better view of Oliver. ‘Mrs. Sowerberry, will you have the goodness to come here a moment, my dear?’

Mrs. Sowerberry emerged from a little room behind the shop, and presented the form of a short, then, squeezed-up woman, with a vixenish countenance.

‘My dear,’ said Mr. Sowerberry, deferentially, ‘this is the boy from the workhouse that I told you of.’ Oliver bowed again.

‘Dear me!’ said the undertaker’s wife, ‘he’s very small.’

‘Why, he *is* rather small,’ replied Mr. Bumble: looking at Oliver as if it were his fault that he was no bigger; ‘he is small. There’s no denying it. But he’ll grow, Mrs. Sowerberry—he’ll grow.’

‘Ah! I dare say he will,’ replied the lady pettishly, ‘on our victuals and our drink. I see no saving in parish children, not I; for they always cost more to keep, than they’re worth. However, men always think they know best. There! Get downstairs, little bag o’ bones.’ With this, the undertaker’s wife opened a side door, and pushed Oliver down a steep flight of stairs into a stone cell, damp and dark: forming the ante-room to the coal-cellar, and denominated ‘kitchen’; wherein sat a slatternly girl, in shoes down at heel, and blue worsted stockings very much out of repair.

‘Here, Charlotte,’ said Mr. Sowerberry, who had followed Oliver down, ‘give this boy some of the cold bits that were put by for Trip. He hasn’t come home since the morning, so he may go without ’em. I dare say the boy isn’t too dainty to eat ’em—are you, boy?’

Oliver, whose eyes had glistened at the mention of meat, and who was trembling with eagerness to devour it, replied in the negative; and a plateful of coarse broken victuals was set before him.

I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. I wish he could have witnessed the horrible avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the ferocity of famine. There is only one thing I should like better; and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish.

‘Well,’ said the undertaker’s wife, when Oliver had finished his supper: which she had regarded in silent horror, and with fearful auguries of his future appetite: ‘have you done?’

There being nothing eatable within his reach, Oliver replied in the affirmative.

‘Then come with me,’ said Mrs. Sowerberry: taking up a dim and dirty lamp, and leading the way upstairs; ‘your bed’s under the counter. You don’t mind sleeping among the coffins, I suppose? But it doesn’t much matter whether you do or don’t, for you can’t sleep anywhere else. Come; don’t keep me here all night!’

Oliver lingered no longer, but meekly followed his new mistress.

CHAPTER V

OLIVER, BEING LEFT TO himself in the undertaker's shop, set the lamp down on a workman's bench, and gazed timidly about him with a feeling of awe and dread, which many people a good deal older than he will be at no loss to understand. An unfinished coffin on black tressels, which stood in the middle of the shop, looked so gloomy and death-like that a cold tremble came over him, every time his eyes wandered in the direction of the dismal object: from which he almost expected to see some frightful form slowly rear its head, to drive him mad with terror. Against the wall were ranged, in regular array, a long row of elm boards cut in the same shape: looking in the dim light, like high-shouldered ghosts with their hands in their breeches pockets. Coffin-plates, elm-chips, bright-headed nails, and shreds of black cloth, lay scattered on the floor; and the wall behind the counter was ornamented with a lively representation of two mutes in very stiff neckcloths, on duty at a large private door, with a hearse drawn by four black steeds, approaching in the distance. The shop was close and hot. The atmosphere seemed tainted with the smell of coffins. The recess beneath the counter in which his flock mattress was thrust, looked like a grave.

Nor were these the only dismal feelings which depressed Oliver. He was alone in a strange place; and we all know how chilled and desolate the best of us will sometimes feel in such a situation. The boy had no friends to care for, or to care for him. The regret of no recent separation was fresh in his mind; the absence of no loved and well-remembered face sank heavily into his heart.

But his heart was heavy, notwithstanding; and he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he could be lain in a calm and lasting sleep in the churchyard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head, and the sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his

sleep.

Oliver was awakened in the morning, by a loud kicking at the outside of the shop-door: which, before he could huddle on his clothes, was repeated, in an angry and impetuous manner, about twenty-five times. When he began to undo the chain, the legs desisted, and a voice began.

‘Open the door, will yer?’ cried the voice which belonged to the legs which had kicked at the door.

‘I will, directly, sir,’ replied Oliver: undoing the chain, and turning the key.

‘I suppose yer the new boy, ain’t yer?’ said the voice through the key-hole.

‘Yes, sir,’ replied Oliver.

‘How old are yer?’ inquired the voice.

‘Ten, sir,’ replied Oliver.

‘Then I’ll whop yer when I get in,’ said the voice; ‘you just see if I don’t, that’s all, my work’us brat!’ and having made this obliging promise, the voice began to whistle.

Oliver had been too often subjected to the process to which the very expressive monosyllable just recorded bears reference, to entertain the smallest doubt that the owner of the voice, whoever he might be, would redeem his pledge, most honourably. He drew back the bolts with a trembling hand, and opened the door.

For a second or two, Oliver glanced up the street, and down the street, and over the way: impressed with the belief that the unknown, who had addressed him through the key-hole, had walked a few paces off, to warm himself; for nobody did he see but a big charity-boy, sitting on a post in front of the house, eating a slice of bread and butter: which he cut into wedges, the size of his mouth, with a clasp-knife, and then consumed with great dexterity.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ said Oliver at length: seeing that no other visitor made his appearance; ‘did you knock?’

‘I kicked,’ replied the charity-boy.

‘Did you want a coffin, sir?’ inquired Oliver, innocently.

At this, the charity-boy looked monstrous fierce; and said that Oliver would want one before long, if he cut jokes with his superiors in that way.

‘Yer don’t know who I am, I suppose, Work’us?’ said the charity-boy, in

continuation: descending from the top of the post, meanwhile, with edifying gravity.

‘No, sir,’ rejoined Oliver.

‘I’m Mister Noah Claypole,’ said the charity-boy, ‘and you’re under me. Take down the shutters, yer idle young ruffian!’ With this, Mr. Claypole administered a kick to Oliver, and entered the shop with a dignified air, which did him great credit. It is difficult for a large-headed, small-eyed youth, of lumbering make and heavy countenance, to look dignified under any circumstances; but it is more especially so, when superadded to these personal attractions are a red nose and yellow smalls.

Oliver, having taken down the shutters, and broken a pane of glass in his effort to stagger away beneath the weight of the first one to a small court at the side of the house in which they were kept during the day, was graciously assisted by Noah: who having consoled him with the assurance that ‘he’d catch it,’ condescended to help him. Mr. Sowerberry came down soon after. Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Sowerberry appeared. Oliver having ‘caught it,’ in fulfilment of Noah’s prediction, followed that young gentleman down the stairs to breakfast.

‘Come near the fire, Noah,’ said Charlotte. ‘I saved a nice little bit of bacon for you from master’s breakfast. Oliver, shut that door at Mister Noah’s back, and take them bits that I’ve put out on the cover of the bread-pan. There’s your tea; take it away to that box, and drink it there, and make haste, for they’ll want you to mind the shop. D’ye hear?’

‘D’ye hear, Work’us?’ said Noah Claypole.

‘Lor, Noah!’ said Charlotte, ‘what a rum creature you are! Why don’t you let the boy alone?’

‘Let him alone!’ said Noah. ‘Why everybody lets him alone enough, for the matter of that. Neither his father nor his mother will ever interfere with him. All his relations let him have his own way pretty well. Eh, Charlotte? He! he! he!’

‘Oh, you queer soul!’ said Charlotte, bursting into a hearty laugh, in which she was joined by Noah; after which they both looked scornfully at poor Oliver Twist, as he sat shivering on the box in the coldest corner of the room, and ate the stale pieces which had been specially reserved for him.

Noah was a charity-boy, but not a workhouse orphan. No chance-child was he, for he could trace his genealogy all the way back to his parents,

who lived hard by; his mother being a washerwoman, and his father a drunken soldier, discharged with a wooden leg, and a diurnal pension of twopence-halfpenny and an unstateable fraction. The shop-boys in the neighbourhood had long been in the habit of branding Noah in the public streets, with the ignominious epithets of ‘leathers,’ ‘charity,’ and the like; and Noah had bourne them without reply. But, now that fortune had cast in his way a nameless orphan, at whom even the meanest could point the finger of scorn, he retorted on him with interest. This affords charming food for contemplation. It shows us what a beautiful thing human nature may be made to be; and how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in the finest lord and the dirtiest charity-boy.

Oliver had been sojourning at the undertaker’s some three weeks or a month. Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry—the shop being shut up—were taking their supper in the little back-parlour, when Mr. Sowerberry, after several deferential glances at his wife, said,

‘My dear—’ He was going to say more; but, Mrs. Sowerberry looking up, with a peculiarly unpropitious aspect, he stopped short.

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Sowerberry, sharply.

‘Nothing, my dear, nothing,’ said Mr. Sowerberry.

‘Ugh, you brute!’ said Mrs. Sowerberry.

‘Not at all, my dear,’ said Mr. Sowerberry humbly. ‘I thought you didn’t want to hear, my dear. I was only going to say—’

‘Oh, don’t tell me what you were going to say,’ interposed Mrs. Sowerberry. ‘I am nobody; don’t consult me, pray. *I* don’t want to intrude upon your secrets.’ As Mrs. Sowerberry said this, she gave an hysterical laugh, which threatened violent consequences.

‘But, my dear,’ said Sowerberry, ‘I want to ask your advice.’

‘No, no, don’t ask mine,’ replied Mrs. Sowerberry, in an affecting manner: ‘ask somebody else’s.’ Here, there was another hysterical laugh, which frightened Mr. Sowerberry very much. This is a very common and much-approved matrimonial course of treatment, which is often very effective. It at once reduced Mr. Sowerberry to begging, as a special favour, to be allowed to say what Mrs. Sowerberry was most curious to hear. After a short duration, the permission was most graciously conceded.

‘It’s only about young Twist, my dear,’ said Mr. Sowerberry. ‘A very good-looking boy, that, my dear.’

‘He need be, for he eats enough,’ observed the lady.

‘There’s an expression of melancholy in his face, my dear,’ resumed Mr. Sowerberry, ‘which is very interesting. He would make a delightful mute, my love.’

Mrs. Sowerberry looked up with an expression of considerable wonderment. Mr. Sowerberry remarked it and, without allowing time for any observation on the good lady’s part, proceeded.

‘I don’t mean a regular mute to attend grown-up people, my dear, but only for children’s practice. It would be very new to have a mute in proportion, my dear. You may depend upon it, it would have a superb effect.’

Mrs. Sowerberry, who had a good deal of taste in the undertaking way, was much struck by the novelty of this idea; but, as it would have been compromising her dignity to have said so, under existing circumstances, she merely inquired, with much sharpness, why such an obvious suggestion had not presented itself to her husband’s mind before? Mr. Sowerberry rightly construed this, as an acquiescence in his proposition; it was speedily determined, therefore, that Oliver should be at once initiated into the mysteries of the trade; and, with this view, that he should accompany his master on the very next occasion of his services being required.

The occasion was not long in coming. Half an hour after breakfast next morning, Mr. Bumble entered the shop; and supporting his cane against the counter, drew forth his large leathern pocket-book: from which he selected a small scrap of paper, which he handed over to Sowerberry.

‘Aha!’ said the undertaker, glancing over it with a lively countenance; ‘an order for a coffin, eh?’

‘For a coffin first, and a porochial funeral afterwards,’ replied Mr. Bumble, fastening the strap of the leathern pocket-book: which, like himself, was very corpulent.

‘Bayton,’ said the undertaker, looking from the scrap of paper to Mr. Bumble. ‘I never heard the name before.’

Bumble shook his head, as he replied, ‘Obstinate people, Mr. Sowerberry; very obstinate. Proud, too, I’m afraid, sir.’

‘Proud, eh?’ exclaimed Mr. Sowerberry with a sneer. ‘Come, that’s too much.’

‘Oh, it’s sickening,’ replied the beadle. ‘Antimonial, Mr. Sowerberry!’

‘So it is,’ acquiesced the undertaker.

‘We only heard of the family the night before last,’ said the beadle; ‘and we shouldn’t have known anything about them, then, only a woman who lodges in the same house made an application to the porochial committee for them to send the porochial surgeon to see a woman as was very bad. He had gone out to dinner; but his ’prentice (which is a very clever lad) sent ’em some medicine in a blacking-bottle, offhand.’

‘Ah, there’s promptness,’ said the undertaker.

‘Promptness, indeed!’ replied the beadle. ‘But what’s the consequence; what’s the ungrateful behaviour of these rebels, sir? Why, the husband sends back word that the medicine won’t suit his wife’s complaint, and so she shan’t take it—says she shan’t take it, sir! Good, strong, wholesome medicine, as was given with great success to two Irish labourers and a coal-heaver, only a week before—sent ’em for nothing, with a blackin’-bottle in,—and he sends back word that she shan’t take it, sir!’

As the atrocity presented itself to Mr. Bumble’s mind in full force, he struck the counter sharply with his cane, and became flushed with indignation.

‘Well,’ said the undertaker, ‘I ne—ver—did—’

‘Never did, sir!’ ejaculated the beadle. ‘No, nor nobody never did; but now she’s dead, we’ve got to bury her; and that’s the direction; and the sooner it’s done, the better.’

Thus saying, Mr. Bumble put on his cocked hat wrong side first, in a fever of parochial excitement; and flounced out of the shop.

‘Why, he was so angry, Oliver, that he forgot even to ask after you!’ said Mr. Sowerberry, looking after the beadle as he strode down the street.

‘Yes, sir,’ replied Oliver, who had carefully kept himself out of sight, during the interview; and who was shaking from head to foot at the mere recollection of the sound of Mr. Bumble’s voice.

He needn’t haven taken the trouble to shrink from Mr. Bumble’s glance, however; for that functionary, on whom the prediction of the gentleman in the white waistcoat had made a very strong impression, thought that now the undertaker had got Oliver upon trial the subject was better avoided, until such time as he should be firmly bound for seven years, and all danger of his being returned upon the hands of the parish should be thus effectually and legally overcome.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Sowerberry, taking up his hat, ‘the sooner this job is done, the better. Noah, look after the shop. Oliver, put on your cap, and come with me.’ Oliver obeyed, and followed his master on his professional mission.

They walked on, for some time, through the most crowded and densely inhabited part of the town; and then, striking down a narrow street more dirty and miserable than any they had yet passed through, paused to look for the house which was the object of their search. The houses on either side were high and large, but very old, and tenanted by people of the poorest class: as their neglected appearance would have sufficiently denoted, without the concurrent testimony afforded by the squalid looks of the few men and women who, with folded arms and bodies half doubled, occasionally skulked along. A great many of the tenements had shop-fronts; but these were fast closed, and mouldering away; only the upper rooms being inhabited. Some houses which had become insecure from age and decay, were prevented from falling into the street, by huge beams of wood reared against the walls, and firmly planted in the road; but even these crazy dens seemed to have been selected as the nightly haunts of some houseless wretches, for many of the rough boards which supplied the place of door and window, were wrenched from their positions, to afford an aperture wide enough for the passage of a human body. The kennel was stagnant and filthy. The very rats, which here and there lay putrefying in its rottenness, were hideous with famine.

There was neither knocker nor bell-handle at the open door where Oliver and his master stopped; so, groping his way cautiously through the dark passage, and bidding Oliver keep close to him and not be afraid the undertaker mounted to the top of the first flight of stairs. Stumbling against a door on the landing, he rapped at it with his knuckles.

It was opened by a young girl of thirteen or fourteen. The undertaker at once saw enough of what the room contained, to know it was the apartment to which he had been directed. He stepped in; Oliver followed him.

There was no fire in the room; but a man was crouching, mechanically, over the empty stove. An old woman, too, had drawn a low stool to the cold hearth, and was sitting beside him. There were some ragged children in another corner; and in a small recess, opposite the door, there lay upon the ground, something covered with an old blanket. Oliver shuddered as he cast

his eyes toward the place, and crept involuntarily closer to his master; for though it was covered up, the boy felt that it was a corpse.

The man's face was thin and very pale; his hair and beard were grizzly; his eyes were bloodshot. The old woman's face was wrinkled; her two remaining teeth protruded over her under lip; and her eyes were bright and piercing. Oliver was afraid to look at either her or the man. They seemed so like the rats he had seen outside.

'Nobody shall go near her,' said the man, starting fiercely up, as the undertaker approached the recess. 'Keep back! Damn you, keep back, if you've a life to lose!'

'Nonsense, my good man,' said the undertaker, who was pretty well used to misery in all its shapes. 'Nonsense!'

'I tell you,' said the man: clenching his hands, and stamping furiously on the floor,—'I tell you I won't have her put into the ground. She couldn't rest there. The worms would worry her—not eat her—she is so worn away.'

The undertaker offered no reply to this raving; but producing a tape from his pocket, knelt down for a moment by the side of the body.

'Ah!' said the man: bursting into tears, and sinking on his knees at the feet of the dead woman; 'kneel down, kneel down—kneel round her, every one of you, and mark my words! I say she was starved to death. I never knew how bad she was, till the fever came upon her; and then her bones were starting through the skin. There was neither fire nor candle; she died in the dark—in the dark! She couldn't even see her children's faces, though we heard her gasping out their names. I begged for her in the streets: and they sent me to prison. When I came back, she was dying; and all the blood in my heart has dried up, for they starved her to death. I swear it before the God that saw it! They starved her!' He twined his hands in his hair; and, with a loud scream, rolled grovelling upon the floor: his eyes fixed, and the foam covering his lips.

The terrified children cried bitterly; but the old woman, who had hitherto remained as quiet as if she had been wholly deaf to all that passed, menaced them into silence. Having unloosened the cravat of the man who still remained extended on the ground, she tottered towards the undertaker.

'She was my daughter,' said the old woman, nodding her head in the direction of the corpse; and speaking with an idiotic leer, more ghastly than even the presence of death in such a place. 'Lord, Lord! Well, it *is* strange

that I who gave birth to her, and was a woman then, should be alive and merry now, and she lying there: so cold and stiff! Lord, Lord!—to think of it; it's as good as a play—as good as a play!'

As the wretched creature mumbled and chuckled in her hideous merriment, the undertaker turned to go away.

'Stop, stop!' said the old woman in a loud whisper. 'Will she be buried to-morrow, or next day, or to-night? I laid her out; and I must walk, you know. Send me a large cloak: a good warm one: for it is bitter cold. We should have cake and wine, too, before we go! Never mind; send some bread—only a loaf of bread and a cup of water. Shall we have some bread, dear?' she said eagerly: catching at the undertaker's coat, as he once more moved towards the door.

'Yes, yes,' said the undertaker,' of course. Anything you like!' He disengaged himself from the old woman's grasp; and, drawing Oliver after him, hurried away.

The next day, (the family having been meanwhile relieved with a half-quartern loaf and a piece of cheese, left with them by Mr. Bumble himself,) Oliver and his master returned to the miserable abode; where Mr. Bumble had already arrived, accompanied by four men from the workhouse, who were to act as bearers. An old black cloak had been thrown over the rags of the old woman and the man; and the bare coffin having been screwed down, was hoisted on the shoulders of the bearers, and carried into the street.

'Now, you must put your best leg foremost, old lady!' whispered Sowerberry in the old woman's ear; 'we are rather late; and it won't do, to keep the clergyman waiting. Move on, my men,—as quick as you like!'

Thus directed, the bearers trotted on under their light burden; and the two mourners kept as near them, as they could. Mr. Bumble and Sowerberry walked at a good smart pace in front; and Oliver, whose legs were not so long as his master's, ran by the side.

There was not so great a necessity for hurrying as Mr. Sowerberry had anticipated, however; for when they reached the obscure corner of the churchyard in which the nettles grew, and where the parish graves were made, the clergyman had not arrived; and the clerk, who was sitting by the vestry-room fire, seemed to think it by no means improbable that it might be an hour or so, before he came. So, they put the bier on the brink of the grave; and the two mourners waited patiently in the damp clay, with a cold

rain drizzling down, while the ragged boys whom the spectacle had attracted into the churchyard played a noisy game at hide-and-seek among the tombstones, or varied their amusements by jumping backwards and forwards over the coffin. Mr. Sowerberry and Bumble, being personal friends of the clerk, sat by the fire with him, and read the paper.

At length, after a lapse of something more than an hour, Mr. Bumble, and Sowerberry, and the clerk, were seen running towards the grave. Immediately afterwards, the clergyman appeared: putting on his surplice as he came along. Mr. Bumble then thrashed a boy or two, to keep up appearances; and the reverend gentleman, having read as much of the burial service as could be compressed into four minutes, gave his surplice to the clerk, and walked away again.

‘Now, Bill!’ said Sowerberry to the grave-digger. ‘Fill up!’

It was no very difficult task, for the grave was so full, that the uppermost coffin was within a few feet of the surface. The grave-digger shovelled in the earth; stamped it loosely down with his feet: shouldered his spade; and walked off, followed by the boys, who murmured very loud complaints at the fun being over so soon.

‘Come, my good fellow!’ said Bumble, tapping the man on the back. ‘They want to shut up the yard.’

The man who had never once moved, since he had taken his station by the grave side, started, raised his head, stared at the person who had addressed him, walked forward for a few paces; and fell down in a swoon. The crazy old woman was too much occupied in bewailing the loss of her cloak (which the undertaker had taken off), to pay him any attention; so they threw a can of cold water over him; and when he came to, saw him safely out of the churchyard, locked the gate, and departed on their different ways.

‘Well, Oliver,’ said Sowerberry, as they walked home, ‘how do you like it?’

‘Pretty well, thank you, sir,’ replied Oliver, with considerable hesitation. ‘Not very much, sir.’

‘Ah, you’ll get used to it in time, Oliver,’ said Sowerberry. ‘Nothing when you *are* used to it, my boy.’

Oliver wondered, in his own mind, whether it had taken a very long time to get Mr. Sowerberry used to it. But he thought it better not to ask the

question; and walked back to the shop: thinking over all he had seen and heard.

CHAPTER VI

THE MONTH'S TRIAL OVER, Oliver was formally apprenticed. It was a nice sickly season just at this time. In commercial phrase, coffins were looking up; and, in the course of a few weeks, Oliver acquired a great deal of experience. The success of Mr. Sowerberry's ingenious speculation, exceeded even his most sanguine hopes. The oldest inhabitants recollected no period at which measles had been so prevalent, or so fatal to infant existence; and many were the mournful processions which little Oliver headed, in a hat-band reaching down to his knees, to the indescribable admiration and emotion of all the mothers in the town. As Oliver accompanied his master in most of his adult expeditions too, in order that he might acquire that equanimity of demeanour and full command of nerve which was essential to a finished undertaker, he had many opportunities of observing the beautiful resignation and fortitude with which some strong-minded people bear their trials and losses.

For instance; when Sowerberry had an order for the burial of some rich old lady or gentleman, who was surrounded by a great number of nephews and nieces, who had been perfectly inconsolable during the previous illness, and whose grief had been wholly irrepressible even on the most public occasions, they would be as happy among themselves as need be—quite cheerful and contented—conversing together with as much freedom and gaiety, as if nothing whatever had happened to disturb them. Husbands, too, bore the loss of their wives with the most heroic calmness. Wives, again, put on weeds for their husbands, as if, so far from grieving in the garb of sorrow, they had made up their minds to render it as becoming and attractive as possible. It was observable, too, that ladies and gentlemen who were in passions of anguish during the ceremony of interment, recovered almost as soon as they reached home, and became quite composed before

the tea-drinking was over. All this was very pleasant and improving to see; and Oliver beheld it with great admiration.

That Oliver Twist was moved to resignation by the example of these good people, I cannot, although I am his biographer, undertake to affirm with any degree of confidence; but I can most distinctly say, that for many months he continued meekly to submit to the domination and ill-treatment of Noah Claypole: who used him far worse than before, now that his jealousy was roused by seeing the new boy promoted to the black stick and hatband, while he, the old one, remained stationary in the muffin-cap and leathers. Charlotte treated him ill, because Noah did; and Mrs. Sowerberry was his decided enemy, because Mr. Sowerberry was disposed to be his friend; so, between these three on one side, and a glut of funerals on the other, Oliver was not altogether as comfortable as the hungry pig was, when he was shut up, by mistake, in the grain department of a brewery.

And now, I come to a very important passage in Oliver's history; for I have to record an act, slight and unimportant perhaps in appearance, but which indirectly produced a material change in all his future prospects and proceedings.

One day, Oliver and Noah had descended into the kitchen at the usual dinner-hour, to banquet upon a small joint of mutton—a pound and a half of the worst end of the neck—when Charlotte being called out of the way, there ensued a brief interval of time, which Noah Claypole, being hungry and vicious, considered he could not possibly devote to a worthier purpose than aggravating and tantalising young Oliver Twist.

Intent upon this innocent amusement, Noah put his feet on the table-cloth; and pulled Oliver's hair; and twitched his ears; and expressed his opinion that he was a 'sneak'; and furthermore announced his intention of coming to see him hanged, whenever that desirable event should take place; and entered upon various topics of petty annoyance, like a malicious and ill-conditioned charity-boy as he was. But, making Oliver cry, Noah attempted to be more facetious still; and in his attempt, did what many sometimes do to this day, when they want to be funny. He got rather personal.

'Work'us,' said Noah, 'how's your mother?'

'She's dead,' replied Oliver; 'don't you say anything about her to me!'

Oliver's colour rose as he said this; he breathed quickly; and there was a curious working of the mouth and nostrils, which Mr. Claypole thought

must be the immediate precursor of a violent fit of crying. Under this impression he returned to the charge.

‘What did she die of, Work’us?’ said Noah.

‘Of a broken heart, some of our old nurses told me,’ replied Oliver: more as if he were talking to himself, than answering Noah. ‘I think I know what it must be to die of that!’

‘Tol de rol lol lol, right fol lairy, Work’us,’ said Noah, as a tear rolled down Oliver’s cheek. ‘What’s set you a snivelling now?’

‘Not *you*,’ replied Oliver, sharply. ‘There; that’s enough. Don’t say anything more to me about her; you’d better not!’

‘Better not!’ exclaimed Noah. ‘Well! Better not! Work’us, don’t be impudent. *Your* mother, too! She was a nice ’un she was. Oh, Lor!’ And here, Noah nodded his head expressively; and curled up as much of his small red nose as muscular action could collect together, for the occasion.

‘Yer know, Work’us,’ continued Noah, emboldened by Oliver’s silence, and speaking in a jeering tone of affected pity: of all tones the most annoying: ‘Yer know, Work’us, it can’t be helped now; and of course yer couldn’t help it then; and I am very sorry for it; and I’m sure we all are, and pity yer very much. But yer must know, Work’us, yer mother was a regular right-down bad ’un.’

‘What did you say?’ inquired Oliver, looking up very quickly.

‘A regular right-down bad ’un, Work’us,’ replied Noah, coolly. ‘And it’s a great deal better, Work’us, that she died when she did, or else she’d have been hard labouring in Bridewell, or transported, or hung; which is more likely than either, isn’t it?’

Crimson with fury, Oliver started up; overthrew the chair and table; seized Noah by the throat; shook him, in the violence of his rage, till his teeth chattered in his head; and collecting his whole force into one heavy blow, felled him to the ground.

A minute ago, the boy had looked the quiet child, mild, dejected creature that harsh treatment had made him. But his spirit was roused at last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire. His breast heaved; his attitude was erect; his eye bright and vivid; his whole person changed, as he stood glaring over the cowardly tormentor who now lay crouching at his feet; and defied him with an energy he had never known before.

‘He’ll murder me!’ blubbered Noah. ‘Charlotte! missis! Here’s the new

boy a murdering of me! Help! help! Oliver's gone mad! Char—lotte!'

Noah's shouts were responded to, by a loud scream from Charlotte, and a louder from Mrs. Sowerberry; the former of whom rushed into the kitchen by a side-door, while the latter paused on the staircase till she was quite certain that it was consistent with the preservation of human life, to come further down.

'Oh, you little wretch!' screamed Charlotte: seizing Oliver with her utmost force, which was about equal to that of a moderately strong man in particularly good training. 'Oh, you little un-grate-ful, mur-de-rous, hor-rid villain!' And between every syllable, Charlotte gave Oliver a blow with all her might: accompanying it with a scream, for the benefit of society.

Charlotte's fist was by no means a light one; but, lest it should not be effectual in calming Oliver's wrath, Mrs. Sowerberry plunged into the kitchen, and assisted to hold him with one hand, while she scratched his face with the other. In this favourable position of affairs, Noah rose from the ground, and pommelled him behind.

This was rather too violent exercise to last long. When they were all wearied out, and could tear and beat no longer, they dragged Oliver, struggling and shouting, but nothing daunted, into the dust-cellar, and there locked him up. This being done, Mrs. Sowerberry sunk into a chair, and burst into tears.

'Bless her, she's going off!' said Charlotte. 'A glass of water, Noah, dear. Make haste!'

'Oh! Charlotte,' said Mrs. Sowerberry: speaking as well as she could, through a deficiency of breath, and a sufficiency of cold water, which Noah had poured over her head and shoulders. 'Oh! Charlotte, what a mercy we have not all been murdered in our beds!'

'Ah! mercy indeed, ma'am,' was the reply. I only hope this'll teach master not to have any more of these dreadful creatures, that are born to be murderers and robbers from their very cradle. Poor Noah! He was all but killed, ma'am, when I come in.'

'Poor fellow!' said Mrs. Sowerberry: looking piteously on the charity-boy.

Noah, whose top waistcoat-button might have been somewhere on a level with the crown of Oliver's head, rubbed his eyes with the inside of his wrists while this commiseration was bestowed upon him, and performed

some affecting tears and sniffs.

‘What’s to be done!’ exclaimed Mrs. Sowerberry. ‘Your master’s not at home; there’s not a man in the house, and he’ll kick that door down in ten minutes.’ Oliver’s vigorous plunges against the bit of timber in question, rendered this occurance highly probable.

‘Dear, dear! I don’t know, ma’am,’ said Charlotte, ‘unless we send for the police-officers.’

‘Or the millingtary,’ suggested Mr. Claypole.

‘No, no,’ said Mrs. Sowerberry: bethinking herself of Oliver’s old friend. ‘Run to Mr. Bumble, Noah, and tell him to come here directly, and not to lose a minute; never mind your cap! Make haste! You can hold a knife to that black eye, as you run along. It’ll keep the swelling down.’

Noah stopped to make no reply, but started off at his fullest speed; and very much it astonished the people who were out walking, to see a charity-boy tearing through the streets pell-mell, with no cap on his head, and a clasp-knife at his eye.

CHAPTER VII

NOAH CLAYPOLE RAN ALONG the streets at his swiftest pace, and paused not once for breath, until he reached the workhouse-gate. Having rested here, for a minute or so, to collect a good burst of sobs and an imposing show of tears and terror, he knocked loudly at the wicket; and presented such a rueful face to the aged pauper who opened it, that even he, who saw nothing but rueful faces about him at the best of times, started back in astonishment.

‘Why, what’s the matter with the boy!’ said the old pauper.

‘Mr. Bumble! Mr. Bumble!’ cried Noah, with well-affected dismay: and in tones so loud and agitated, that they not only caught the ear of Mr. Bumble himself, who happened to be hard by, but alarmed him so much that he rushed into the yard without his cocked hat,—which is a very curious and remarkable circumstance: as showing that even a beadle, acted upon a sudden and powerful impulse, may be afflicted with a momentary visitation of loss of self-possession, and forgetfulness of personal dignity.

‘Oh, Mr. Bumble, sir!’ said Noah: ‘Oliver, sir,—Oliver has—’

‘What? What?’ interposed Mr. Bumble: with a gleam of pleasure in his metallic eyes. ‘Not run away; he hasn’t run away, has he, Noah?’

‘No, sir, no. Not run away, sir, but he’s turned wicious,’ replied Noah. ‘He tried to murder me, sir; and then he tried to murder Charlotte; and then missis. Oh! what dreadful pain it is!

Such agony, please, sir!’ And here, Noah writhed and twisted his body into an extensive variety of eel-like positions; thereby giving Mr. Bumble to understand that, from the violent and sanguinary onset of Oliver Twist, he had sustained severe internal injury and damage, from which he was at that moment suffering the acutest torture.

When Noah saw that the intelligence he communicated perfectly

paralysed Mr. Bumble, he imparted additional effect thereunto, by bewailing his dreadful wounds ten times louder than before; and when he observed a gentleman in a white waistcoat crossing the yard, he was more tragic in his lamentations than ever: rightly conceiving it highly expedient to attract the notice, and rouse the indignation, of the gentleman aforesaid.

The gentleman's notice was very soon attracted; for he had not walked three paces, when he turned angrily round, and inquired what that young cur was howling for, and why Mr. Bumble did not favour him with something which would render the series of vocular exclamations so designated, an involuntary process?

'It's a poor boy from the free-school, sir,' replied Mr. Bumble, 'who has been nearly murdered—all but murdered, sir,—by young Twist.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed the gentleman in the white waistcoat, stopping short. 'I knew it! I felt a strange presentiment from the very first, that that audacious young savage would come to be hung!'

'He has likewise attempted, sir, to murder the female servant,' said Mr. Bumble, with a face of ashy paleness.

'And his missis,' interposed Mr. Claypole.

'And his master, too, I think you said, Noah?' added Mr. Bumble.

'No! he's out, or he would have murdered him,' replied Noah. 'He said he wanted to.'

'Ah! Said he wanted to, did he, my boy?' inquired the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'Yes, sir,' replied Noah. 'And please, sir, missis wants to know whether Mr. Bumble can spare time to step up there, directly, and flog him—'cause master's out.'

'Certainly, my boy; certainly,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat: smiling benignly, and patting Noah's head, which was about three inches higher than his own. 'You're a good boy—a very good boy. Here's a penny for you. Bumble, just step up to Sowerberry's with your cane, and see what's best to be done. Don't spare him, Bumble.'

'No, I will not, sir,' replied the beadle. And the cocked hat and cane having been, by this time, adjusted to their owner's satisfaction, Mr. Bumble and Noah Claypole betook themselves with all speed to the undertaker's shop.

Here the position of affairs had not at all improved. Sowerberry had not

yet returned, and Oliver continued to kick, with undiminished vigour, at the cellar-door. The accounts of his ferocity as related by Mrs. Sowerberry and Charlotte, were of so startling a nature, that Mr. Bumble judged it prudent to parley, before opening the door. With this view he gave a kick at the outside, by way of prelude; and, then, applying his mouth to the keyhole, said, in a deep and impressive tone:

'Oliver!'

'Come; you let me out!' replied Oliver, from the inside.

'Do you know this here voice, Oliver?' said Mr. Bumble.

'Yes,' replied Oliver.

'Ain't you afraid of it, sir? Ain't you a-trembling while I speak, sir?' said Mr. Bumble.

'No!' replied Oliver, boldly.

An answer so different from the one he had expected to elicit, and was in the habit of receiving, staggered Mr. Bumble not a little. He stepped back from the keyhole; drew himself up to his full height; and looked from one to another of the three bystanders, in mute astonishment.

'Oh, you know, Mr. Bumble, he must be mad,' said Mrs. Sowerberry.

'No boy in half his senses could venture to speak so to you.'

'It's not Madness, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble, after a few moments of deep meditation. 'It's Meat.'

'What?' exclaimed Mrs. Sowerberry.

'Meat, ma'am, meat,' replied Bumble, with stern emphasis. 'You've over-fed him, ma'am. You've raised a artificial soul and spirit in him, ma'am unbecoming a person of his condition: as the board, Mrs. Sowerberry, who are practical philosophers, will tell you. What have paupers to do with soul or spirit? It's quite enough that we let 'em have live bodies. If you had kept the boy on gruel, ma'am, this would never have happened.'

'Dear, dear!' ejaculated Mrs. Sowerberry, piously raising her eyes to the kitchen ceiling: 'this comes of being liberal!'

The liberality of Mrs. Sowerberry to Oliver, had consisted of a profuse bestowal upon him of all the dirty odds and ends which nobody else would eat; so there was a great deal of meekness and self-devotion in her voluntarily remaining under Mr. Bumble's heavy accusation. Of which, to do her justice, she was wholly innocent, in thought, word, or deed.

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Bumble, when the lady brought her eyes down to earth again; ‘the only thing that can be done now, that I know of, is to leave him in the cellar for a day or so, till he’s a little starved down; and then to take him out, and keep him on gruel all through the apprenticeship. He comes of a bad family. Excitable natures, Mrs. Sowerberry! Both the nurse and doctor said, that that mother of his made her way here, against difficulties and pain that would have killed any well-disposed woman, weeks before.’

At this point of Mr. Bumble’s discourse, Oliver, just hearing enough to know that some allusion was being made to his mother, recommenced kicking, with a violence that rendered every other sound inaudible. Sowerberry returned at this juncture. Oliver’s offence having been explained to him, with such exaggerations as the ladies thought best calculated to rouse his ire, he unlocked the cellar-door in a twinkling, and dragged his rebellious apprentice out, by the collar.

Oliver’s clothes had been torn in the beating he had received; his face was bruised and scratched; and his hair scattered over his forehead. The angry flush had not disappeared, however; and when he was pulled out of his prison, he scowled boldly on Noah, and looked quite undismayed.

‘Now, you are a nice young fellow, ain’t you?’ said Sowerberry; giving Oliver a shake, and a box on the ear.

‘He called my mother names,’ replied Oliver.

‘Well, and what if he did, you little ungrateful wretch?’ said Mrs. Sowerberry. ‘She deserved what he said, and worse.’

‘She didn’t,’ said Oliver.

‘She did,’ said Mrs. Sowerberry.

‘It’s a lie!’ said Oliver.

Mrs. Sowerberry burst into a flood of tears.

This flood of tears left Mr. Sowerberry no alternative. If he had hesitated for one instant to punish Oliver most severely, it must be quite clear to every experienced reader that he would have been, according to all precedents in disputes of matrimony established, a brute, an unnatural husband, an insulting creature, a base imitation of a man, and various other agreeable characters too numerous for recital within the limits of this chapter. To do him justice, he was, as far as his power went—it was not very extensive—kindly disposed towards the boy; perhaps, because it was his interest to be so; perhaps, because his wife disliked him. The flood of

tears, however, left him no resource; so he at once gave him a drubbing, which satisfied even Mrs. Sowerberry herself, and rendered Mr. Bumble's subsequent application of the parochial cane, rather unnecessary. For the rest of the day, he was shut up in the back kitchen, in company with a pump and a slice of bread; and at night, Mrs. Sowerberry, after making various remarks outside the door, by no means complimentary to the memory of his mother, looked into the room, and, amidst the jeers and pointings of Noah and Charlotte, ordered him upstairs to his dismal bed.

It was not until he was left alone in the silence and stillness of the gloomy workshop of the undertaker, that Oliver gave way to the feelings which the day's treatment may be supposed likely to have awakened in a mere child. He had listened to their taunts with a look of contempt; he had borne the lash without a cry: for he felt that pride swelling in his heart which would have kept down a shriek to the last, though they had roasted him alive. But now, when there were none to see or hear him, he fell upon his knees on the floor; and, hiding his face in his hands, wept such tears as, God send for the credit of our nature, few so young may ever have cause to pour out before him!

For a long time, Oliver remained motionless in this attitude. The candle was burning low in the socket when he rose to his feet. Having gazed cautiously round him, and listened intently, he gently undid the fastenings of the door, and looked abroad.

It was a cold, dark night. The stars seemed, to the boy's eyes, farther from the earth than he had ever seen them before; there was no wind; and the sombre shadows thrown by the trees upon the ground, looked sepulchral and death-like, from being so still. He softly reclosed the door. Having availed himself of the expiring light of the candle to tie up in a handkerchief the few articles of wearing apparel he had, sat himself down upon a bench, to wait for morning.

With the first ray of light that struggled through the crevices in the shutters, Oliver arose, and again unbarred the door. One timid look around —one moment's pause of hesitation—he had closed it behind him, and was in the open street.

He looked to the right and to the left, uncertain whither to fly.

He remembered to have seen the waggons, as they went out, toiling up the hill. He took the same route; and arriving at a footpath across the fields:

which he knew, after some distance, led out again into the road; struck into it, and walked quickly on.

Along this same footpath, Oliver well-remembered he had trotted beside Mr. Bumble, when he first carried him to the workhouse from the farm. His way lay directly in front of the cottage. His heart beat quickly when he bethought himself of this; and he half resolved to turn back. He had come a long way though, and should lose a great deal of time by doing so. Besides, it was so early that there was very little fear of his being seen; so he walked on.

He reached the house. There was no appearance of its inmates stirring at that early hour. Oliver stopped, and peeped into the garden. A child was weeding one of the little beds; as he stopped, he raised his pale face and disclosed the features of one of his former companions. Oliver felt glad to see him, before he went; for, though younger than himself, he had been his little friend and playmate. They had been beaten, and starved, and shut up together, many and many a time.

‘Hush, Dick!’ said Oliver, as the boy ran to the gate, and thrust his thin arm between the rails to greet him. ‘Is any one up?’

‘Nobody but me,’ replied the child.

‘You musn’t say you saw me, Dick,’ said Oliver. ‘I am running away. They beat and ill-use me, Dick; and I am going to seek my fortune, some long way off. I don’t know where. How pale you are!’

‘I heard the doctor tell them I was dying,’ replied the child with a faint smile. ‘I am very glad to see you, dear; but don’t stop, don’t stop!’

‘Yes, yes, I will, to say good-b’ye to you,’ replied Oliver. ‘I shall see you again, Dick. I know I shall! You will be well and happy!’

‘I hope so,’ replied the child. ‘After I am dead, but not before. I know the doctor must be right, Oliver, because I dream so much of Heaven, and Angels, and kind faces that I never see when I am awake. Kiss me,’ said the child, climbing up the low gate, and flinging his little arms round Oliver’s neck. ‘Good-b’ye, dear! God bless you!’

The blessing was from a young child’s lips, but it was the first that Oliver had ever heard invoked upon his head; and through the struggles and sufferings, and troubles and changes, of his after life, he never once forgot it.

CHAPTER VIII

OLIVER REACHED THE STILE at which the by-path terminated; and once more gained the high-road. It was eight o'clock now. Though he was nearly five miles away from the town, he ran, and hid behind the hedges, by turns, till noon: fearing that he might be pursued and overtaken. Then he sat down to rest by the side of the milestone, and began to think, for the first time, where he had better go and try to live.

The stone by which he was seated, bore, in large characters, an intimation that it was just seventy miles from that spot to London. The name awakened a new train of ideas in the boy's mind.

London!—that great place!—nobody—not even Mr. Bumble—could ever find him there! He had often heard the old men in the workhouse, too, say that no lad of spirit need want in London; and that there were ways of living in that vast city, which those who had been bred up in country parts had no idea of. It was the very place for a homeless boy, who must die in the streets unless some one helped him. As these things passed through his thoughts, he jumped upon his feet, and again walked forward.

He had diminished the distance between himself and London by full four miles more, before he recollected how much he must undergo ere he could hope to reach his place of destination. As this consideration forced itself upon him, he slackened his pace a little, and meditated upon his means of getting there. He had a crust of bread, a coarse shirt, and two pairs of stockings, in his bundle. He had a penny too—a gift of Sowerberry's after some funeral in which he had acquitted himself more than ordinarily well—in his pocket. 'A clean shirt,' thought Oliver, 'is a very comfortable thing; and so are two pairs of darned stockings; and so is a penny; but they are small helps to a sixty-five miles' walk in winter time.' But Oliver's thoughts, like those of most other people, although they were extremely

ready and active to point out his difficulties, were wholly at a loss to suggest any feasible mode of surmounting them; so, after a good deal of thinking to no particular purpose, he changed his little bundle over to the other shoulder, and trudged on.

Oliver walked twenty miles that day; and all that time tasted nothing but the crust of dry bread, and a few draughts of water, which he begged at the cottage-doors by the road-side. When the night came, he turned into a meadow; and, creeping close under a hay-rick, determined to lie there, till morning. He felt frightened at first, for the wind moaned dismally over the empty fields: and he was cold and hungry, and more alone than he had ever felt before. Being very tired with his walk, however, he soon fell asleep and forgot his troubles.

He felt cold and stiff, when he got up next morning, and so hungry that he was obliged to exchange the penny for a small loaf, in the very first village through which he passed. He had walked no more than twelve miles, when night closed in again. His feet were sore, and his legs so weak that they trembled beneath him. Another night passed in the bleak damp air, made him worse; when he set forward on his journey next morning he could hardly crawl along.

He waited at the bottom of a steep hill till a stage-coach came up, and then begged of the outside passengers; but there were very few who took any notice of him: and even those told him to wait till they got to the top of the hill, and then let them see how far he could run for a halfpenny. Poor Oliver tried to keep up with the coach a little way, but was unable to do it, by reason of his fatigue and sore feet. When the outsides saw this, they put their halfpence back into their pockets again, declaring that he was an idle young dog, and didn’t deserve anything; and the coach rattled away and left only a cloud of dust behind.

In some villages, large painted boards were fixed up: warning all persons who begged within the district, that they would be sent to jail. This frightened Oliver very much, and made him glad to get out of those villages with all possible expedition. In others, he would stand about the inn-yards, and look mournfully at every one who passed: a proceeding which generally terminated in the landlady’s ordering one of the post-boys who were lounging about, to drive that strange boy out of the place, for she was sure he had come to steal something. If he begged at a farmer’s house, ten

to one but they threatened to set the dog on him; and when he showed his nose in a shop, they talked about the beadle—which brought Oliver's heart into his mouth,—very often the only thing he had there, for many hours together.

In fact, if it had not been for a good-hearted turnpike-man, and a benevolent old lady, Oliver's troubles would have been shortened by the very same process which had put an end to his mother's; in other words, he would most assuredly have fallen dead upon the king's highway. But the turnpike-man gave him a meal of bread and cheese; and the old lady, who had a shipwrecked grandson wandering barefoot in some distant part of the earth, took pity upon the poor orphan, and gave him what little she could afford—and more—with such kind and gentle words, and such tears of sympathy and compassion, that they sank deeper into Oliver's soul, than all the sufferings he had ever undergone.

Early on the seventh morning after he had left his native place, Oliver limped slowly into the little town of Barnet. The window-shutters were closed; the street was empty; not a soul had awakened to the business of the day. The sun was rising in all its splendid beauty; but the light only served to show the boy his own lonesomeness and desolation, as he sat, with bleeding feet and covered with dust, upon a door-step.

By degrees, the shutters were opened; the window-blinds were drawn up; and people began passing to and fro. Some few stopped to gaze at Oliver for a moment or two, or turned round to stare at him as they hurried by; but none relieved him, or troubled themselves to inquire how he came there. He had no heart to beg. And there he sat.

He had been crouching on the step for some time: wondering at the great number of public-houses (every other house in Barnet was a tavern, large or small), gazing listlessly at the coaches as they passed through, and thinking how strange it seemed that they could do, with ease, in a few hours, what it had taken him a whole week of courage and determination beyond his years to accomplish: when he was roused by observing that a boy, who had passed him carelessly some minutes before, had returned, and was now surveying him most earnestly from the opposite side of the way. He took little heed of this at first; but the boy remained in the same attitude of close observation so long, that Oliver raised his head, and returned his steady look. Upon this, the boy crossed over; and walking close up to Oliver, said,

‘Hullo, my covey! What’s the row?’

The boy who addressed this inquiry to the young wayfarer, was about his own age: but one of the queerest looking boys that Oliver had even seen. He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough; and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had about him all the airs and manners of a man. He was short of his age: with rather bow-legs, and little, sharp, ugly eyes. His hat was stuck on the top of his head so lightly, that it threatened to fall off every moment—and would have done so, very often, if the wearer had not had a knack of every now and then giving his head a sudden twitch, which brought it back to its old place again. He wore a man’s coat, which reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back, half-way up his arm, to get his hands out of the sleeves: apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers; for there he kept them. He was, altogether, as roystering and swaggering a young gentleman as ever stood four feet six, or something less, in the bluchers.

‘Hullo, my covey! What’s the row?’ said this strange young gentleman to Oliver.

‘I am very hungry and tired,’ replied Oliver: the tears standing in his eyes as he spoke. ‘I have walked a long way. I have been walking these seven days.’

‘Walking for sivin days!’ said the young gentleman. ‘Oh, I see. Beak’s order, eh? But,’ he added, noticing Oliver’s look of surprise, ‘I suppose you don’t know what a beak is, my flash com-pan-i-on.’

Oliver mildly replied, that he had always heard a bird’s mouth described by the term in question.

‘My eyes, how green!’ exclaimed the young gentleman. ‘Why, a beak’s a madgst’rate; and when you walk by a beak’s order, it’s not straight forerd, but always agoing up, and niver a coming down agin. Was you never on the mill?’

‘What mill?’ inquired Oliver.

‘What mill! Why, *the* mill—the mill as takes up so little room that it’ll work inside a Stone Jug; and always goes better when the wind’s low with people, than when it’s high; acos then they can’t get workmen. But come,’ said the young gentleman; ‘you want grub, and you shall have it. I’m at low-water-mark myself—only one bob and a magpie; but, as far as it goes,

I’ll fork out and stump. Up with you on your pins. There! Now then! ’Morrice!’

Assisting Oliver to rise, the young gentleman took him to an adjacent chandler’s shop, where he purchased a sufficiency of ready-dressed ham and a half-quartern loaf, or, as he himself expressed it, ‘a fourpenny bran!’ the ham being kept clean and preserved from dust, by the ingenious expedient of making a hole in the loaf by pulling out a portion of the crumb, and stuffing it therein. Taking the bread under his arm, the young gentlman turned into a small public-house, and led the way to a tap-room in the rear of the premises. Here, a pot of beer was brought in, by direction of the mysterious youth; and Oliver, falling to, at his new friend’s bidding, made a long and hearty meal, during the progress of which the strange boy eyed him from time to time with great attention.

‘Going to London?’ said the strange boy, when Oliver had at length concluded.

‘Yes.’

‘Got any lodgings?’

‘No.’

‘Money?’

‘No.’

The strange boy whistled; and put his arms into his pockets, as far as the big coat-sleeves would let them go.

‘Do you live in London?’ inquired Oliver.

‘Yes. I do, when I’m at home,’ replied the boy. ‘I suppose you want some place to sleep in to-night, don’t you?’

‘I do, indeed,’ answered Oliver. ‘I have not slept under a roof since I left the country.’

‘Don’t fret your eyelids on that score,’ said the young gentleman. ‘I’ve got to be in London to-night; and I know a ’spectable old gentleman as lives there, wot’ll give you lodgings for nothink, and never ask for the change—that is, if any genelman he knows interduces you. And don’t he know me? Oh, no! Not in the least! By no means. Certainly not!’

The young gentleman smiled, as if to intimate that the latter fragments of discourse were playfully ironical; and finished the beer as he did so.

This unexpected offer of shelter was too tempting to be resisted; especially as it was immediately followed up, by the assurance that the old

gentleman referred to, would doubtless provide Oliver with a comfortable place, without loss of time. This led to a more friendly and confidential dialogue; from which Oliver discovered that his friend's name was Jack Dawkins, and that he was a peculiar pet and protégé of the elderly gentleman before mentioned.

Mr. Dawkin's appearance did not say a vast deal in favour of the comforts which his patron's interest obtained for those whom he took under his protection; but, as he had a rather flightly and dissolute mode of conversing, and furthermore avowed that among his intimate friends he was better known by the sobriquet of 'The Artful Dodger,' Oliver concluded that, being of a dissipated and careless turn, the moral precepts of his benefactor had hitherto been thrown away upon him. Under this impression, he secretly resolved to cultivate the good opinion of the old gentleman as quickly as possible; and, if he found the Dodger incorrigible, as he more than half suspected he should, to decline the honour of his farther acquaintance.

As John Dawkins objected to their entering London before nightfall, it was nearly eleven o'clock when they reached the turnpike at Islington. They crossed from the Angel into St. John's Road; struck down the small street which terminates at Sadler's Wells Theatre; through Exmouth Street and Coppice Row; down the little court by the side of the workhouse; across the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence into Little Saffron Hill; and so into Saffron Hill the Great: along which the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace, directing Oliver to follow close at his heels.

Although Oliver had enough to occupy his attention in keeping sight of his leader, he could not help bestowing a few hasty glances on either side of the way, as he passed along. A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours.

There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out at the doors, or screaming from the inside. The sole places that seemed to prosper amid the general blight of the place, were the public-houses; and in them, the lowest orders of Irish were wrangling with might and main. Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged

from the main street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in filth; and from several of the door-ways, great ill-looking fellows were cautiously emerging, bound, to all appearance, on no very well-disposed or harmless errands.

Oliver was just considering whether he hadn't better run away, when they reached the bottom of the hill. His conductor, catching him by the arm, pushed open the door of a house near Field Lane; and drawing him into the passage, closed it behind them.

'Now, then!' cried a voice from below, in reply to a whistle from the Dodger.

'Plummy and slam!' was the reply.

This seemed to be some watchword or signal that all was right; for the light of a feeble candle gleamed on the wall at the remote end of the passage; and a man's face peeped out, from where a balustrade of the old kitchen staircase had been broken away.

'There's two on you,' said the man, thrusting the candle farther out, and shielding his eyes with his hand. 'Who's the t'other one?'

'A new pal,' replied Jack Dawkins, pulling Oliver forward.

'Where did he come from?'

'Greenland. Is Fagin upstairs?'

'Yes, he's a sortin' the wipes. Up with you!' The candle was drawn back, and the face disappeared.

Oliver, groping his way with one hand, and having the other firmly grasped by his companion, ascended with much difficulty the dark and broken stairs: which his conductor mounted with an ease and expedition that showed he was well acquainted with them.

He threw open the door of a back-room, and drew Oliver in after him.

The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black with age and dirt. There was a deal table before the fire: upon which were a candle, stuck in a ginger-beer bottle, two or three pewter pots, a loaf and butter, and a plate. In a frying-pan, which was on the fire, and which was secured to the mantelshelf by a string, some sausages were cooking; and standing over them, with a toasting-fork in his hand, was a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare; and seemed to be dividing his attention between the frying-pan and the clothes-

horse, over which a great number of silk handkerchiefs were hanging. Several rough beds made of old sacks, were huddled side by side on the floor. Seated round the table were four or five boys, none older than the Dodger, smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men. These all crowded about their associate as he whispered a few words to the Jew; and then turned round and grinned at Oliver. So did the Jew himself, toasting-fork in hand.

'This is him, Fagin,' said Jack Dawkins;' my friend Oliver Twist.'

The Jew grinned; and, making a low obeisance to Oliver, took him by the hand, and hoped he should have the honour of his intimate acquaintance. Upon this, the young gentleman with the pipes came round him, and shook both his hands very hard—especially the one in which he held his little bundle. One young gentleman was very anxious to hang up his cap for him; and another was so obliging as to put his hands in his pockets, in order that, as he was very tired, he might not have the trouble of emptying them, himself, when he went to bed. These civilities would probably be extended much farther, but for a liberal exercise of the Jew's toasting-fork on the heads and shoulders of the affectionate youths who offered them.

'We are very glad to see you, Oliver, very,' said the Jew. 'Dodger, take off the sausages; and draw a tub near the fire for Oliver. Ah, you're a-staring at the pocket-handkerchiefs! eh, my dear. There are a good many of 'em, ain't there? We've just looked 'em out, ready for the wash; that's all, Oliver; that's all. Ha! ha! ha!'

The latter part of this speech, was hailed by a boisterous shout from all the hopeful pupils of the merry old gentleman. In the midst of which they went to supper.

Oliver ate his share, and the Jew then mixed him a glass of hot gin-and-water: telling him he must drink it off directly, because another gentleman wanted the tumbler. Oliver did as he was desired. Immediately afterwards he felt himself gently lifted on to one of the sacks; and then he sunk into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS LATE NEXT morning when Oliver awoke, from a sound, long sleep. There was no other person in the room but the old Jew, who was boiling some coffee in a saucepan for breakfast, and whistling softly to himself as he stirred it round and round, with an iron spoon. He would stop every now and then to listen when there was the least noise below: and when he had satisfied himself, he would go on whistling and stirring again, as before.

Although Oliver had roused himself from sleep, he was not thoroughly awake. There is a drowsy state, between sleeping and waking, when you dream more in five minutes with your eyes half open, and yourself half conscious of everything that is passing around you, than you would in five nights with your eyes fast closed, and your senses wrapt in perfect unconsciousness. At such time, a mortal knows just enough of what his mind is doing, to form some glimmering conception of its mighty powers, its bounding from earth and spurning time and space, when freed from the restraint of its corporeal associate.

Oliver was precisely in this condition. He saw the Jew with his half-closed eyes; heard his low whistling; and recognised the sound of the spoon grating against the saucepan’s sides: and yet the self-same senses were mentally engaged, at the same time, in busy action with almost everybody he had ever known.

When the coffee was done, the Jew drew the saucepan to the hob. Standing, then in an irresolute attitude for a few minutes, as if he did not well know how to employ himself, he turned round and looked at Oliver, and called him by his name. He did not answer, and was to all appearances asleep.

After satisfying himself upon this head, the Jew stepped gently to the

door: which he fastened. He then drew forth: as it seemed to Oliver, from some trap in the floor: a small box, which he placed carefully on the table. His eyes glistened as he raised the lid, and looked in. Dragging an old chair to the table, he sat down; and took from it a magnificent gold watch, sparkling with jewels.

‘Aha!’ said the Jew, shrugging up his shoulders, and distorting every feature with a hideous grin. ‘Clever dogs! Clever dogs! Staunch to the last! Never told the old parson where they were. Never poached upon old Fagin! And why should they? It wouldn’t have loosened the knot, or kept the drop up, a minute longer. No, no, no! Fine fellows! Fine fellows!’

With these, and other muttered reflections of the like nature, the Jew once more deposited the watch in its place of safety. At least half a dozen more were severally drawn forth from the same box, and surveyed with equal pleasure; besides rings, brooches, bracelets, and other articles of jewellery, of such magnificent materials, and costly workmanship, that Oliver had no idea, even of their names.

Having replaced these trinkets, the Jew took out another: so small that it lay in the palm of his hand. There seemed to be some very minute inscription on it; for the Jew laid it flat upon the table, and shading it with his hand, pored over it, long and earnestly. At length he put it down, as if despairing of success; and, leaning back in his chair, muttered:

‘What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent; dead men never bring awkward stories to light. Ah, it’s a fine thing for the trade! Five of ’em strung up in a row, and none left to play booty, or turn white-livered!’

As the Jew uttered these words, his bright dark eyes, which had been staring vacantly before him, fell on Oliver’s face; the boy’s eyes were fixed on his in mute curiousity; and although the recognition was only for an instant—for the briefest space of time that can possibly be conceived—it was enough to show the old man that he had been observed.

He closed the lid of the box with a loud crash; and, laying his hand on a bread knife which was on the table, started furiously up. He trembled very much though; for, even in his terror, Oliver could see that the knife quivered in the air.

‘What’s that?’ said the Jew. ‘What do you watch me for? Why are you awake? What have you seen? Speak out, boy! Quick—quick! for your life.

‘I wasn’t able to sleep any longer, sir,’ replied Oliver, meekly. ‘I am very sorry if I have disturbed you, sir.’

‘You were not awake an hour ago?’ said the Jew, scowling fiercely on the boy.

‘No! No, indeed!’ replied Oliver.

‘Are you sure?’ cried the Jew: with a still fiercer look than before: and a threatening attitude.

‘Upon my word I was not, sir,’ replied Oliver, earnestly. ‘I was not, indeed, sir.’

‘Tush, tush, my dear!’ said the Jew, abruptly resuming his old manner, and playing with the knife a little, before he laid it down; as if to induce the belief that he had caught it up, in mere sport. ‘Of course I know that, my dear. I only tried to frighten you. You’re a brave boy. Ha! ha! you’re a brave boy, Oliver.’ The Jew rubbed his hands with a chuckle, but glanced uneasily at the box, notwithstanding.

‘Did you see any of these pretty things, my dear?’ said the Jew, laying his hand upon it after a short pause.

‘Yes, sir,’ replied Oliver.

‘Ah!’ said the Jew, turning rather pale. ‘They—they’re mine, Oliver; my little property. All I have to live upon, in my old age. The folks call me a miser, my dear. Only a miser; that’s all.’

Oliver thought the old gentleman must be a decided miser to live in such a dirty place, with so many watches; but, thinking that perhaps his fondness for the Dodger and the other boys, cost him a good deal of money, he only cast a deferential look at the Jew, and asked if he might get up.

‘Certainly, my dear, certainly,’ replied the old gentleman. ‘Stay. There’s a pitcher of water in the corner by the door. Bring it here; and I’ll give you a basin to wash in, my dear.’

Oliver got up; walked across the room; and stooped for an instant to raise the pitcher. When he turned his head, the box was gone.

He had scarcely washed himself, and made everything tidy, by emptying the basin out of the window, agreeably to the Jew’s directions, when the Dodger returned: accompanied by a very sprightly young friend, whom Oliver had seen smoking on the previous night, and who was now formally introduced to him as Charley Bates. The four sat down, to breakfast, on the coffee, and some hot rolls and ham which the Dodger had brought home in

the crown of his hat.

‘Well,’ said the Jew, glancing slyly at Oliver, and addressing himself to the Dodger, ‘I hope you’ve been at work this morning, my dears?’

‘Hard,’ replied the Dodger.

‘As nails,’ added Charley Bates.

‘Good boys, good boys!’ said the Jew. ‘What have you got, Dodger?’

‘A couple of pocket-books,’ replied that young gentlman.

‘Lined?’ inquired the Jew, with eagerness.

‘Pretty well,’ replied the Dodger, producing two pocket-books; one green, and the other red.

‘Not so heavy as they might be,’ said the Jew, after looking at the insides carefully; ‘but very neat and nicely made. Ingenious workman, ain’t he, Oliver?’

‘Very indeed, sir,’ said Oliver. At which Mr. Charles Bates laughed uproariously; very much to the amazement of Oliver, who saw nothing to laugh at, in anything that had passed.

‘And what have you got, my dear?’ said Fagin to Charley Bates.

‘Wipes,’ replied Master Bates; at the same time producing four pocket-handkerchiefs.

‘Well,’ said the Jew, inspecting them closely; ‘they’re very good ones, very. You haven’t marked them well, though, Charley; so the marks shall be picked out with a needle, and we’ll teach Oliver how to do it. Shall us, Oliver, eh? Ha! ha! ha!’

‘If you please, sir,’ said Oliver.

‘You’d like to be able to make pocket-handkerchiefs as easy as Charley Bates, wouldn’t you, my dear?’ said the Jew.

‘Very much, indeed, if you’ll teach me, sir,’ replied Oliver.

Master Bates saw something so exquisitely ludicrous in this reply, that he burst into another laugh; which laugh, meeting the coffee he was drinking, and carrying it down some wrong channel, very nearly terminated in his premature suffocation.

‘He is so jolly green!’ said Charley when he recovered, as an apology to the company for his unpolite behaviour.

The Dodger said nothing, but he smoothed Oliver’s hair over his eyes, and said he’d know better, by and by; upon which the old gentleman, observing Oliver’s colour mounting, changed the subject by asking whether

there had been much of a crowd at the execution that morning? This made him wonder more and more; for it was plain from the replies of the two boys that they had both been there; and Oliver naturally wondered how they could possibly have found time to be so very industrious.

When the breakfast was cleared away; the merry old gentlman and the two boys played at a very curious and uncommon game, which was performed in this way. The merry old gentleman, placing a snuff-box in one pocket of his trousers, a note-case in the other, and a watch in his waistcoat pocket, with a guard-chain round his neck, and sticking a mock diamond pin in his shirt: buttoned his coat tight round him, and putting his spectacle-case and handkerchief in his pockets, trotted up and down the room with a stick, in imitation of the manner in which old gentlemen walk about the streets any hour in the day. Sometimes he stopped at the fire-place, and sometimes at the door, making believe that he was staring with all his might into shop-windows. At such times, he would look constantly round him, for fear of thieves, and would keep slapping all his pockets in turn, to see that he hadn’t lost anything, in such a very funny and natural manner, that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face. All this time, the two boys followed him closely about: getting out of his sight, so nimbly, every time he turned round, that it was impossible to follow their motions. At last, the Dodger trod upon his toes, or ran upon his boot accidently, while Charley Bates stumbled up against him behind; and in that one moment they took from him, with the most extraordinary rapidity, snuff-box, note-case, watch-guard, chain, shirt-pin, pocket-handkerchief, even the spectacle-case. If the old gentlman felt a hand in any one of his pockets, he cried out where it was; and then the game began all over again.

When this game had been played a great many times, a couple of young ladies called to see the young gentleman; one of whom was named Bet, and the other Nancy. They wore a good deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps; but they had a great deal of colour in their faces, and looked quite stout and hearty. Being remarkably free and agreeable in their manners, Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed. As there is no doubt they were.

The visitors stopped a long time. Spirits were produced, in consequence of one of the young ladies complaining of a coldness in her inside; and the

conversation took a very convivial and improving turn. At length, Charley Bates expressed his opinion that it was time to pad the hoof. This, it occurred to Oliver, must be French for going out; for directly afterwards, the Dodger, and Charley, and the two young ladies, went away together, having been kindly furnished by the amiable old Jew with money to spend.

‘There, my dear,’ said Fagin. ‘That’s a pleasant life, isn’t it? They have gone out for the day.’

‘Have they done work, sir?’ inquired Oliver.

‘Yes,’ said the Jew; ‘that is, unless they should unexpectedly come across any, when they are out; and they won’t neglect it, if they do, my dear, depend upon it. Make ’em your models, my dear. Make ’em your models,’ tapping the fire-shovel on the hearth to add force to his words; ‘do everything they bid you, and take their advice in all matters—especially the Dodger’s, my dear. He’ll be a great man himself, and will make you one too, if you take pattern by him.—Is my handkerchief hanging out of my pocket, my dear?’ said the Jew, stopping short.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Oliver.

‘See if you can take it out, without my feeling it; as you saw them do, when we were at play this morning.’

Oliver held up the bottom of the pocket with one hand, as he had seen the Dodger hold it, and drew the handkerchief lightly out of it with the other.

‘Is it gone?’ cried the Jew.

‘Here it is, sir,’ said Oliver, showing it in his hand.

‘You’re a clever boy, my dear,’ said the playful old gentleman, patting Oliver on the head approvingly. ‘I never saw a sharper lad. Here’s a shilling for you. If you go on, in this way, you’ll be the greatest man of the time. And now come here, and I’ll show you how to take the marks out of the handkerchiefs.’

Oliver wondered what picking the old gentleman’s pocket in play, had to do with his chances of being a great man. But, thinking that the Jew, being so much his senior, must know best, he followed him quietly to the table, and was soon deeply involved in his new study.

CHAPTER X

FOR MANY DAYS, OLIVER remained in the Jew's room, picking the marks out of the pocket-handkerchief, (of which a great number were brought home,) and sometimes taking part in the game already described: which the two boys and the Jew played, regularly, every morning. At length, he began to languish for fresh air, and took many occasions of earnestly entreating the old gentleman to allow him to go out to work with his two companions.

Oliver was rendered the more anxious to be actively employed, by what he had seen of the stern morality of the old gentleman's character. Whenever the Dodger or Charley Bates came home at night, empty-handed, he would expatiate with great vehemence on the misery of idle and lazy habits; and would enforce upon them the necessity of an active life, by sending them supperless to bed. On one occasion, indeed, he even went so far as to knock them both down a flight of stairs; but this was carrying out his virtuous precepts to an unusual extent.

At length, one morning, Oliver obtained the permission he had so eagerly sought. There had been no handkerchiefs to work upon, for two or three days, and the dinners had been rather meagre. Perhaps these were reasons for the old gentleman's giving his assent; but, whether they were or no, he told Oliver he might go, and placed him under the joint guardianship of Charley Bates, and his friend the Dodger.

The three boys sallied out; the Dodger with his coat-sleeves tucked up, and his hat cocked, as usual; Master Bates sauntering along with his hands in his pockets; and Oliver between them, wondering where they were going, and what branch of manufacture he would be instructed in, first.

The pace at which they went, was such a very lazy, ill-looking saunter, that Oliver soon began to think his companions were going to deceive the

old gentleman, by not going to work at all. The Dodger had a vicious propensity, too, of pulling the caps from the heads of small boys and tossing them down areas; while Charley Bates exhibited some very loose notions concerning the rights of property, by pilfering divers apples and onions from the stalls at the kennel sides, and thrusting them into pockets which were so surprisingly capacious, that they seemed to undermine his whole suit of clothes in every direction. These things looked so bad, that Oliver was on the point of declaring his intention of seeking his way back, in the best way he could; when his thoughts were suddenly directed into another channel, by a very mysterious change of behaviour on the part of the Dodger.

They were just emerging from a narrow court not far from the open square in Clerkenwell, which is yet called, by some strange perversion of terms, ‘The Green’: when the Dodger made a sudden stop; and, laying his finger on his lip, drew his companions back again, with the greatest caution and circumspection.

‘What’s the matter?’ demanded Oliver.

‘Hush!’ replied the Dodger. ‘Do you see that old cove at the book-stall?’

‘The old gentleman over the way?’ said Oliver. ‘Yes, I see him.’

‘He’ll do,’ said the Dodger.

‘A prime plant,’ observed Master Charley Bates.

Oliver looked from one to the other, with the greatest surprise; but he was not permitted to make any inquiries; for the two boys walked stealthily across the road, and slunk close behind the old gentleman towards whom his attention had been directed. Oliver walked a few paces after them; and, not knowing whether to advance or retire, stood looking on in silent amazement.

The old gentleman was a very respectable-looking personage, with a powdered head and gold spectacles. He was dressed in a bottle-green coat with a black velvet collar; wore white trousers; and carried a smart bamboo cane under his arm. He had taken up a book from the stall, and there he stood, reading away, as hard as if he were in his elbow-chair, in his own study. It is very possible that he fancied himself there, indeed; for it was plain, from his abstraction, that he saw not the book-stall, nor the street, nor the boys, nor, in short, anything but the book itself: which he was reading straight through: turning over the leaf when he got to the bottom of a page,

beginning at the top line of the next one, and going regularly on, with the greatest interest and eagerness.

What was Oliver's horror and alarm as he stood a few paces off, looking on with his eyelids as wide open as they would possibly go, to see the Dodger plunge his hand into the old gentleman's pocket, and draw from thence a handkerchief! To see him hand the same to Charley Bates; and finally to behold them, both running away round the corner at full speed!

In an instant the whole mystery of the hankerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew, rushed upon the boy's mind.

He stood, for a moment, with the blood so tingling through all his veins from terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning fire; then, confused and frightened, he took to his heels; and, not knowing what he did, made off as fast as he could lay his feet to the ground.

This was all done in a minute's space. In the very instant when Oliver began to run, the old gentleman, putting his hand to his pocket, and missing his handkerchief, turned sharp round. Seeing the boy scudding away at such a rapid pace, he very naturally concluded him to be the depredator; and shouting 'Stop thief!' with all his might, made off after him, book in hand.

But the old gentleman was not the only person who raised the hue-and-cry. The Dodger and Master Bates, unwilling to attract public attention by running down the open street, had merely retired into the very first doorway round the corner. They no sooner heard the cry, and saw Oliver running, than, guessing exactly how the matter stood, they issued forth with great promptitude; and, shouting 'Stop thief!' too, joined in the pursuit like good citizens.

Although Oliver had been brought up by philosophers, he was not theoretically acquainted with the beautiful axiom that self-preservation is the first law of nature. If he had been, perhaps he would have been prepared for this. Not being prepared, however, it alarmed him the more; so away he went like the wind, with the old gentleman and the two boys roaring and shouting behind him.

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' There is a magic in the sound. The tradesman leaves his counter, and the car-man his waggon; the butcher throws down his tray; the baker his basket; the milkman his pail; the errand-boy his parcels; the school-boy his marbles; the paviour his pickaxe; the child his battledore. Away they run, pell-mell, helter-skelter, slap-dash: tearing,

yelling, screaming, knocking down the passengers as they turn the corners, rousing up the dogs, and astonishing the fowls: and streets, squares, and courts, re-echo with the sound.

‘Stop thief! Stop thief!’ The cry is taken up by a hundred voices, and the crowd accumulate at every turning. Away they fly, splashing through the mud, and rattling along the pavements: up go the windows, out run the people, onward bear the mob, a whole audience desert Punch in the very thickest of the plot, and, joining the rushing throng, swell the shout, and lend fresh vigour to the cry, ‘Stop thief! Stop thief!’

‘Stop thief! Stop thief!’ There is a passion FOR *hunting something* deeply implanted in the human breast. One wretched breathless child, panting with exhaustion; terror in his looks; agony in his eyes; large drops of perspiration streaming down his face; strains every nerve to make head upon his pursuers; and as they follow on his track, and gain upon him every instant, they hail his decreasing strength with joy. ‘Stop thief!’ Ay, stop him for God’s sake, were it only in mercy!

Stopped at last! A clever blow. He is down upon the pavement; and the crowd eagerly gather round him: each new comer, jostling and struggling with the others to catch a glimpse. ‘Stand aside!’ ‘Give him a little air!’ ‘Nonsense! he don’t deserve it.’ ‘Where’s the gentleman?’ ‘Here his is, coming down the street.’ ‘Make room there for the gentleman!’ ‘Is this the boy, sir!’ ‘Yes.’

Oliver lay, covered with mud and dust, and bleeding from the mouth, looking wildly round upon the heap of faces that surrounded him, when the old gentleman was officiously dragged and pushed into the circle by the foremost of the pursuers.

‘Yes,’ said the gentleman, ‘I am afraid it is the boy.’

‘Afraid!’ murmured the crowd. ‘That’s a good ’un!’

‘Poor fellow!’ said the gentleman, ‘he has hurt himself.’

‘*I* did that, sir,’ said a great lubberly fellow, stepping forward; ‘and preciously I cut my knuckle agin’ his mouth. I stopped him, sir.’

The fellow touched his hat with a grin, expecting something for his pains; but, the old gentleman, eyeing him with an expression of dislike, look anxiously round, as if he contemplated running away himself: which it is very possible he might have attempted to do, and thus have afforded another chase, had not a police officer (who is generally the last person to

arrive in such cases) at that moment made his way through the crowd, and seized Oliver by the collar.

‘Come, get up,’ said the man, roughly.

‘It wasn’t me indeed, sir. Indeed, indeed, it was two other boys,’ said Oliver, clasping his hands passionately, and looking round. ‘They are here somewhere.’

‘Oh no, they ain’t,’ said the officer. He meant this to be ironical, but it was true besides; for the Dodger and Charley Bates had filed off down the first convenient court they came to.

‘Come, get up!’

‘Don’t hurt him,’ said the old gentleman, compassionately.

‘Oh no, I won’t hurt him,’ replied the officer, tearing his jacket half off his back, in proof thereof. ‘Come, I know you; it won’t do. Will you stand upon your legs, you young devil?’

Oliver, who could hardly stand, made a shift to raise himself on his feet, and was at once lugged along the streets by the jacket-collar, at a rapid pace. The gentleman walked on with them by the officer’s side; and as many of the crowd as could achieve the feat, got a little ahead, and stared back at Oliver from time to time. The boys shouted in triumph; and on they went.

CHAPTER XI

THE OFFENCE HAD BEEN committed within the district, and indeed in the immediate neighborhood of, a very notorious metropolitan police office. The crowd had only the satisfaction of accompanying Oliver through two or three streets, and down a place called Mutton Hill, when he was led beneath a low archway, and up a dirty court, into this dispensary of summary justice, by the back way. It was a small paved yard into which they turned; and here they encountered a stout man with a bunch of whiskers on his face, and a bunch of keys in his hand.

‘What’s the matter now?’ said the man carelessly.

‘A young fogle-hunter,’ replied the man who had Oliver in charge.

‘Are you the party that’s been robbed, sir?’ inquired the man with the keys.

‘Yes, I am,’ replied the old gentleman; ‘but I am not sure that this boy actually took the handkerchief. I—I would rather not press the case.’

‘Must go before the magistrate now, sir,’ replied the man. ‘His worship will be disengaged in half a minute. Now, young gallows!’

This was an invitation for Oliver to enter through a door which he unlocked as he spoke, and which led into a stone cell. Here he was searched; and nothing being found upon him, locked up.

This cell was in shape and size something like an area cellar, only not so light. It was most intolerably dirty; for it was Monday morning; and it had been tenanted by six drunken people, who had been locked up, elsewhere, since Saturday night. But this is little. In our station-houses, men and women are every night confined on the most trivial charges—the word is worth noting—in dungeons, compared with which, those in Newgate, occupied by the most atrocious felons, tried, found guilty, and under sentence of death, are palaces. Let any one who doubts this, compare the

two.

The old gentleman looked almost as rueful as Oliver when the key grated in the lock. He turned with a sigh to the book, which had been the innocent cause of all this disturbance.

‘There is something in that boy’s face,’ said the old gentleman to himself as he walked slowly away, tapping his chin with the cover of the book, in a thoughtful manner; ‘something that touches and interests me. *Can* he be innocent? He looked like—Bye the bye,’ exclaimed the old gentleman, halting very abruptly, and staring up into the sky, ‘Bless my soul!—where have I seen something like that look before?’

After musing for some minutes, the old gentleman walked, with the same meditative face, into a back anteroom opening from the yard; and there, retiring into a corner, called up before his mind’s eye a vast amphitheatre of faces over which a dusky curtain had hung for many years. ‘No,’ said the old gentleman, shaking his head; ‘it must be imagination.

He wandered over them again. He had called them into view, and it was not easy to replace the shroud that had so long concealed them. There were the faces of friends, and foes, and of many that had been almost strangers peering intrusively from the crowd; there were the faces of young and blooming girls that were now old women; there were faces that the grave had changed and closed upon, but which the mind, superior to its power, still dressed in their old freshness and beauty, calling back the lustre of the eyes, the brightness of the smile, the beaming of the soul through its mask of clay, and whispering of beauty beyond the tomb, changed but to be heightened, and taken from earth only to be set up as a light, to shed a soft and gentle glow upon the path to Heaven.

But the old gentleman could recall no one countenance of which Oliver’s features bore a trace. So, he heaved a sigh over the recollections he awakened; and being, happily for himself, an absent old gentleman, buried them again in the pages of the musty book.

He was roused by a touch on the shoulder, and a request from the man with the keys to follow him into the office. He closed his book hastily; and was at once ushered into the imposing presence of the renowned Mr. Fang.

The office was a front parlour, with a panelled wall. Mr. Fang sat behind a bar, at the upper end; and on one side the door was a sort of wooden pen in which poor little Oliver was already deposited; trembling very much at

the awfulness of the scene.

Mr. Fang was a lean, long-backed, stiff-necked, middle-sized man, with no great quantity of hair, and what he had, growing on the back and sides of his head. His face was stern, and much flushed. If he were really not in the habit of drinking rather more than was exactly good for him, he might have brought action against his countenance for libel, and have recovered heavy damages.

The old gentleman bowed respectfully; and advancing to the magistrate's desk, said, suiting the action to the word, 'That is my name and address, sir.' He then withdrew a pace or two; and, with another polite and gentlemanly inclination of the head, waited to be questioned.

Now, it so happened that Mr. Fang was at that moment perusing a leading article in a newspaper of the morning, adverting to some recent decision of his, and commending him, for the three hundred and fiftieth time, to the special and particular notice of the Secretary of State for the Home Department. He was out of temper; and he looked up with an angry scowl.

'Who are you?' said Mr. Fang.

The old gentleman pointed, with some surprise, to his card.

'Officer!' said Mr. Fang, tossing the card contemptuously away with the newspaper. 'Who is this fellow?'

'My name, sir,' said the old gentleman, speaking *like* a gentleman, 'my name, sir, is Brownlow. Permit me to inquire the name of the magistrate who offers a gratuitous and unprovoked insult to a respectable person, under the protection of the bench.' Saying this, Mr. Brownlow looked around the office as if in search of some person who would afford him the required information.

'Officer!' said Mr. Fang, throwing the paper on one side, 'what's this fellow charged with?'

'He's not charged at all, your worship,' replied the officer. 'He appears against this boy, your worship.'

His worship knew this perfectly well; but it was a good annoyance, and a safe one.

'Appears against the boy, does he?' said Mr. Fang, surveying Mr. Brownlow contemptuously from head to foot. 'Swear him!'

'Before I am sworn, I must beg to say one word,' said Mr. Brownlow;

‘and that is, that I really never, without actual experience, could have believed—’

‘Hold your tongue, sir!’ said Mr. Fang, peremptorily.

‘I will not, sir!’ replied the old gentleman.

‘Hold your tongue this instant, or I’ll have you turned out of the office!’ said Mr. Fang. ‘You’re an insolent impertinent fellow. How dare you bully a magistrate!’

‘What!’ exclaimed the old gentleman, reddening.

‘Swear this person!’ said Fang to the clerk. ‘I’ll not hear another word. Swear him.’

Mr. Brownlow’s indignation was greatly roused; but reflecting perhaps, that he might only injure the boy by giving vent to it, he suppressed his feelings and submitted to be sworn at once.

‘Now,’ said Fang, ‘what’s the charge against this boy? What have you got to say, sir?’

‘I was standing at a bookstall—’ Mr. Brownlow began.

‘Hold your tongue, sir,’ said Mr. Fang. ‘Policeman! Where’s the policeman? Here, swear this policeman. Now, policeman, what is this?’

The policeman, with becoming humility, related how he had taken the charge; how he had searched Oliver, and found nothing on his person; and how that was all he knew about it.

‘Are there any witnesses?’ inquired Mr. Fang.

‘None, your worship,’ replied the policeman.

Mr. Fang sat silent for some minutes, and then, turning round to the prosecutor, said in a towering passion.

‘Do you mean to state what your complaint against this boy is, man, or do you not? You have been sworn. Now, if you stand there, refusing to give evidence, I’ll punish you for disrespect to the bench; I will, by—’

By what, or by whom, nobody knows, for the clerk and jailor coughed very loud, just at the right moment; and the former dropped a heavy book upon the floor, thus preventing the word from being heard—accidently, of course.

With many interruptions, and repeated insults, Mr. Brownlow contrived to state his case; observing that, in the surprise of the moment, he had run after the boy because he had saw him running away; and expressing his hope that, if the magistrate should believe him, although not actually the

thief, to be connected with the thieves, he would deal as leniently with him as justice would allow.

‘He has been hurt already,’ said the old gentleman in conclusion. ‘And I fear,’ he added, with great energy, looking towards the bar, ‘I really fear that he is ill.’

‘Oh! yes, I dare say!’ said Mr. Fang, with a sneer. ‘Come, none of your tricks here, you young vagabond; they won’t do. What’s your name?’

Oliver tried to reply but his tongue failed him. He was deadly pale; and the whole place seemed turning round and round.

‘What’s your name, you hardened scoundrel?’ demanded Mr. Fang. ‘Officer, what’s his name?’

This was addressed to a bluff old fellow, in a striped waistcoat, who was standing by the bar. He bent over Oliver, and repeated the inquiry; but finding him really incapable of understanding the question; and knowing that his not replying would only infuriate the magistrate the more, and add to the severity of his sentence; he hazarded a guess.

‘He says his name’s Tom White, your worship,’ said the kind-hearted thief-taker.

‘Oh, he won’t speak out, won’t he?’ said Fang. ‘Very well, very well. Where does he live?’

‘Where he can, your worship,’ replied the officer; again pretending to receive Oliver’s answer.

‘Has he any parents?’ inquired Mr. Fang.

‘He says they died in his infancy, your worship,’ replied the officer: hazarding the usual reply.

At this point of the inquiry, Oliver raised his head; and, looking round with imploring eyes, murmured a feeble prayer for a draught of water.

‘Stuff and nonsense!’ said Mr. Fang: ‘don’t try to make a fool of me.’

‘I think he really is ill, your worship,’ remonstrated the officer.

‘I know better,’ said Mr. Fang.

‘Take care of him, officer,’ said the old gentleman, raising his hands instinctively; ‘he’ll fall down.’

‘Stand away, officer,’ cried Fang; ‘let him, if he likes.’

Oliver availed himself of the kind permission, and fell to the floor in a fainting fit. The men in the office looked at each other, but no one dared to stir.

‘I knew he was shamming,’ said Fang, as if this were incontestable proof of the fact. ‘Let him lie there; he’ll soon be tired of that.’

‘How do you propose to deal with the case, sir?’ inquired the clerk in a low voice.

‘Summarily,’ replied Mr. Fang. ‘He stands committed for three months —hard labour of course. Clear the office.’

The door was opened for this purpose, and a couple of men were preparing to carry the insensible boy to his cell; when an elderly man of decent but poor appearance, clad in an old suit of black, rushed hastily into the office, and advanced towards the bench.

‘Stop, stop! don’t take him away! For Heaven’s sake stop a moment!’ cried the new comer, breathless with haste.

Although the presiding Genii in such an office as this, exercise a summary and arbitrary power over the liberties, the good name, the character, almost the lives, of Her Majesty’s subjects, expecially of the poorer class; and although, within such walls, enough fantastic tricks are daily played to make the angels blind with weeping; they are closed to the public, save through the medium of the daily press. [Footnote: Or were virtually, then.] Mr. Fang was consequently not a little indignant to see an unbidden guest enter in such irreverent disorder.

‘What is this? Who is this? Turn this man out. Clear the office!’ cried Mr. Fang.

‘I *will* speak,’ cried the man; ‘I will not be turned out. I saw it all. I keep the book-stall. I demand to be sworn. I will not be put down. Mr. Fang, you must hear me. You must not refuse, sir.’

The man was right. His manner was determined; and the matter was growing rather too serious to be hushed up.

‘Swear the man,’ growled Mr. Fang, with a very ill grace. ‘Now, man, what have you got to say?’

‘This,’ said the man: ‘I saw three boys: two others and the prisoner here: loitering on the opposite side of the way, when this gentleman was reading. The robbery was committed by another boy. I saw it done; and I saw that this boy was perfectly amazed and stupified by it.’ Having by this time recovered a little breath, the worthy book-stall keeper proceeded to relate, in a more coherent manner the exact circumstances of the robbery.

‘Why didn’t you come here before?’ said Fang, after a pause.

‘I hadn’t a soul to mind the shop,’ replied the man. ‘Everybody who could have helped me, had joined in the pursuit. I could get nobody till five minutes ago; and I’ve run here all the way.’

‘The prosecutor was reading, was he?’ inquired Fang, after another pause.

‘Yes,’ replied the man. ‘The very book he has in his hand.’

‘Oh, that book, eh?’ said Fang. ‘Is it paid for?’

‘No, it is not,’ replied the man, with a smile.

‘Dear me, I forgot all about it!’ exclaimed the absent old gentleman, innocently.

‘A nice person to prefer a charge against a poor boy!’ said Fang, with a comical effort to look humane. ‘I consider, sir, that you have obtained possession of that book, under very suspicious and disreputable circumstances; and you may think yourself very fortunate that the owner of the property declines to prosecute. Let this be a lesson to you, my man, or the law will overtake you yet. The boy is discharged. Clear the office!’

‘D—n me!’ cried the old gentleman, bursting out with the rage he had kept down so long, ‘d—n me! I’ll—’

‘Clear the office!’ said the magistrate. ‘Officers, do you hear? Clear the office!’

The mandate was obeyed; and the indignant Mr. Brownlow was conveyed out, with the book in one hand, and the bamboo cane in the other: in a perfect phrenzy of rage and defiance. He reached the yard; and his passion vanished in a moment. Little Oliver Twist lay on his back on the pavement, with his shirt unbuttoned, and his temples bathed with water; his face a deadly white; and a cold tremble convulsing his whole frame.

‘Poor boy, poor boy!’ said Mr. Brownlow, bending over him. ‘Call a coach, somebody, pray. Directly!’

A coach was obtained, and Oliver having been carefully laid on the seat, the old gentleman got in and sat himself on the other.

‘May I accompany you?’ said the book-stall keeper, looking in.

‘Bless me, yes, my dear sir,’ said Mr. Brownlow quickly. ‘I forgot you. Dear, dear! I have this unhappy book still! Jump in. Poor fellow! There’s no time to lose.’

The book-stall keeper got into the coach; and away they drove.

CHAPTER XII

THE COACH RATTLED AWAY, over nearly the same ground as that which Oliver had traversed when he first entered London in company with the Dodger; and, turning a different way when it reached the Angel at Islington, stopped at length before a neat house, in a quiet shady street near Pentonville. Here, a bed was prepared, without loss of time, in which Mr. Brownlow saw his young charge carefully and comfortably deposited; and here, he was tended with a kindness and solicitude that knew no bounds.

But, for many days, Oliver remained insensible to all the goodness of his new friends. The sun rose and sank, and rose and sank again, and many times after that; and still the boy lay stretched on his uneasy bed, dwindling away beneath the dry and wasting heat of fever. The worm does not work more surely on the dead body, than does this slow creeping fire upon the living frame.

Weak, and thin, and pallid, he awoke at last from what seemed to have been a long and troubled dream. Feebly raising himself in the bed, with his head resting on his trembling arm, he looked anxiously around.

‘What room is this? Where have I been brought to?’ said Oliver. ‘This is not the place I went to sleep in.’

He uttered these words in a feeble voice, being very faint and weak; but they were overheard at once. The curtain at the bed’s head was hastily drawn back, and a motherly old lady, very neatly and precisely dressed, rose as she undrew it, from an arm-chair close by, in which she had been sitting at needle-work.

‘Hush, my dear,’ said the old lady softly. ‘You must be very quiet, or you will be ill again; and you have been very bad,—as bad as bad could be, pretty nigh. Lie down again; there’s a dear!’ With those words, the old lady very gently placed Oliver’s head upon the pillow; and, smoothing back his

hair from his forehead, looked so kindly and loving in his face, that he could not help placing his little withered hand in hers, and drawing it round his neck.

‘Save us!’ said the old lady, with tears in her eyes. ‘What a grateful little dear it is. Pretty creetur! What would his mother feel if she had sat by him as I have, and could see him now!’

‘Perhaps she does see me,’ whispered Oliver, folding his hands together; ‘perhaps she has sat by me. I almost feel as if she had.’

‘That was the fever, my dear,’ said the old lady mildly.

‘I suppose it was,’ replied Oliver, ‘because heaven is a long way off; and they are too happy there, to come down to the bedside of a poor boy. But if she knew I was ill, she must have pitied me, even there; for she was very ill herself before she died. She can’t know anything about me though,’ added Oliver after a moment’s silence. ‘If she had seen me hurt, it would have made her sorrowful; and her face has always looked sweet and happy, when I have dreamed of her.’

The old lady made no reply to this; but wiping her eyes first, and her spectacles, which lay on the counterpane, afterwards, as if they were part and parcel of those features, brought some cool stuff for Oliver to drink; and then, patting him on the cheek, told him he must lie very quiet, or he would be ill again.

So, Oliver kept very still; partly because he was anxious to obey the kind old lady in all things; and partly, to tell the truth, because he was completely exhausted with what he had already said. He soon fell into a gentle doze, from which he was awakened by the light of a candle: which, being brought near the bed, showed him a gentleman with a very large and loud-ticking gold watch in his hand, who felt his pulse, and said he was a great deal better.

‘You *are* a great deal better, are you not, my dear?’ said the gentleman.

‘Yes, thank you, sir,’ replied Oliver.

‘Yes, I know you are,’ said the gentleman: ‘You’re hungry too, an’t you?’

‘No, sir,’ answered Oliver.

‘Hem!’ said the gentleman. ‘No, I know you’re not. He is not hungry, Mrs. Bedwin,’ said the gentleman: looking very wise.

The old lady made a respectful inclination of the head, which seemed to

say that she thought the doctor was a very clever man. The doctor appeared much of the same opinion himself.

‘You feel sleepy, don’t you, my dear?’ said the doctor.

‘No, sir,’ replied Oliver.

‘No,’ said the doctor, with a very shrewd and satisfied look. ‘You’re not sleepy. Nor thirsty. Are you?’

‘Yes, sir, rather thirsty,’ answered Oliver.

‘Just as I expected, Mrs. Bedwin,’ said the doctor. ‘It’s very natural that he should be thirsty. You may give him a little tea, ma’am, and some dry toast without any butter. Don’t keep him too warm, ma’am; but be careful that you don’t let him be too cold; will you have the goodness?’

The old lady dropped a curtsey. The doctor, after tasting the cool stuff, and expressing a qualified approval of it, hurried away: his boots creaking in a very important and wealthy manner as he went downstairs.

Oliver dozed off again, soon after this; when he awoke, it was nearly twelve o’clock. The old lady tenderly bade him good-night shortly afterwards, and left him in charge of a fat old woman who had just come: bringing with her, in a little bundle, a small Prayer Book and a large nightcap. Putting the latter on her head and the former on the table, the old woman, after telling Oliver that she had come to sit up with him, drew her chair close to the fire and went off into a series of short naps, chequered at frequent intervals with sundry tumblings forward, and divers moans and chokings. These, however, had no worse effect than causing her to rub her nose very hard, and then fall asleep again.

And thus the night crept slowly on. Oliver lay awake for some time, counting the little circles of light which the reflection of the rushlight-shade threw upon the ceiling; or tracing with his languid eyes the intricate pattern of the paper on the wall. The darkness and the deep stillness of the room were very solemn; as they brought into the boy’s mind the thought that death had been hovering there, for many days and nights, and might yet fill it with the gloom and dread of his awful presence, he turned his face upon the pillow, and fervently prayed to Heaven.

Gradually, he fell into that deep tranquil sleep which ease from recent suffering alone imparts; that calm and peaceful rest which it is pain to wake from. Who, if this were death, would be roused again to all the struggles and turmoils of life; to all its cares for the present; its anxieties for the

future; more than all, its weary recollections of the past!

It had been bright day, for hours, when Oliver opened his eyes; he felt cheerful and happy. The crisis of the disease was safely past. He belonged to the world again.

In three days' time he was able to sit in an easy-chair, well propped up with pillows; and, as he was still too weak to walk, Mrs. Bedwin had him carried downstairs into the little housekeeper's room, which belonged to her. Having him set, here, by the fire-side, the good old lady sat herself down too; and, being in a state of considerable delight at seeing him so much better, forthwith began to cry most violently.

'Never mind me, my dear,' said the old lady; 'I'm only having a regular good cry. There; it's all over now; and I'm quite comfortable.'

'You're very, very kind to me, ma'am,' said Oliver.

'Well, never you mind that, my dear,' said the old lady; 'that's got nothing to do with your broth; and it's full time you had it; for the doctor says Mr. Brownlow may come in to see you this morning; and we must get up our best looks, because the better we look, the more he'll be pleased.' And with this, the old lady applied herself to warming up, in a little saucepan, a basin full of broth: strong enough, Oliver thought, to furnish an ample dinner, when reduced to the regulation strength, for three hundred and fifty paupers, at the lowest computation.

'Are you fond of pictures, dear?' inquired the old lady, seeing that Oliver had fixed his eyes, most intently, on a portrait which hung against the wall; just opposite his chair.

'I don't quite know, ma'am,' said Oliver, without taking his eyes from the canvas; 'I have seen so few that I hardly know. What a beautiful, mild face that lady's is!'

'Ah!' said the old lady, 'painters always make ladies out prettier than they are, or they wouldn't get any custom, child. The man that invented the machine for taking likenesses might have known that would never succeed; it's a deal too honest. A deal,' said the old lady, laughing very heartily at her own acuteness.

'Is—is that a likeness, ma'am?' said Oliver.

'Yes,' said the old lady, looking up for a moment from the broth; 'that's a portrait.'

'Whose, ma'am?' asked Oliver.

‘Why, really, my dear, I don’t know,’ answered the old lady in a good-humoured manner. ‘It’s not a likeness of anybody that you or I know, I expect. It seems to strike your fancy, dear.’

‘It is so pretty,’ replied Oliver.

‘Why, sure you’re not afraid of it?’ said the old lady: observing in great surprise, the look of awe with which the child regarded the painting.

‘Oh no, no,’ returned Oliver quickly; ‘but the eyes look so sorrowful; and where I sit, they seem fixed upon me. It makes my heart beat,’ added Oliver in a low voice, ‘as if it was alive, and wanted to speak to me, but couldn’t.’

‘Lord save us!’ exclaimed the old lady, starting; ‘don’t talk in that way, child. You’re weak and nervous after your illness. Let me wheel your chair round to the other side; and then you won’t see it. There!’ said the old lady, suiting the action to the word; ‘you don’t see it now, at all events.’

Oliver *did* see it in his mind’s eye as distinctly as if he had not altered his position; but he thought it better not to worry the kind old lady; so he smiled gently when she looked at him; and Mrs. Bedwin, satisfied that he felt more comfortable, salted and broke bits of toasted bread into the broth, with all the bustle befitting so solemn a preparation. Oliver got through it with extraordinary expedition. He had scarcely swallowed the last spoonful, when there came a soft rap at the door. ‘Come in,’ said the old lady; and in walked Mr. Brownlow.

Now, the old gentleman came in as brisk as need be; but, he had no sooner raised his spectacles on his forehead, and thrust his hands behind the skirts of his dressing-gown to take a good long look at Oliver, than his countenance underwent a very great variety of odd contortions. Oliver looked very worn and shadowy from sickness, and made an ineffectual attempt to stand up, out of respect to his benefactor, which terminated in his sinking back into the chair again; and the fact is, if the truth must be told, that Mr. Brownlow’s heart, being large enough for any six ordinary old gentlemen of humane disposition, forced a supply of tears into his eyes, by some hydraulic process which we are not sufficiently philosophical to be in a condition to explain.

‘Poor boy, poor boy!’ said Mr. Brownlow, clearing his throat. ‘I’m rather hoarse this morning, Mrs. Bedwin. I’m afraid I have caught cold.’

‘I hope not, sir,’ said Mrs. Bedwin. ‘Everything you have had, has been

well aired, sir.’

‘I don’t know, Bedwin. I don’t know,’ said Mr. Brownlow; ‘I rather think I had a damp napkin at dinner-time yesterday; but never mind that. How do you feel, my dear?’

‘Very happy, sir,’ replied Oliver. ‘And very grateful indeed, sir, for your goodness to me.’

‘Good by,’ said Mr. Brownlow, stoutly. ‘Have you given him any nourishment, Bedwin? Any slops, eh?’

‘He has just had a basin of beautiful strong broth, sir,’ replied Mrs. Bedwin: drawing herself up slightly, and laying strong emphasis on the last word: to intimate that between slops, and broth will compounded, there existed no affinity or connection whatsoever.

‘Ugh!’ said Mr. Brownlow, with a slight shudder; ‘a couple of glasses of port wine would have done him a great deal more good. Wouldn’t they, Tom White, eh?’

‘My name is Oliver, sir,’ replied the little invalid: with a look of great astonishment.

‘Oliver,’ said Mr. Brownlow; ‘Oliver what? Oliver White, eh?’

‘No, sir, Twist, Oliver Twist.’

‘Queer name!’ said the old gentleman. ‘What made you tell the magistrate your name was White?’

‘I never told him so, sir,’ returned Oliver in amazement.

This sounded so like a falsehood, that the old gentleman looked somewhat sternly in Oliver’s face. It was impossible to doubt him; there was truth in every one of its thin and sharpened lineaments.

‘Some mistake,’ said Mr. Brownlow. But, although his motive for looking steadily at Oliver no longer existed, the old idea of the resemblance between his features and some familiar face came upon him so strongly, that he could not withdraw his gaze.

‘I hope you are not angry with me, sir?’ said Oliver, raising his eyes beseechingly.

‘No, no,’ replied the old gentleman. ‘Why! what’s this? Bedwin, look there!’

As he spoke, he pointed hastily to the picture over Oliver’s head, and then to the boy’s face. There was its living copy. The eyes, the head, the mouth; every feature was the same. The expression was, for the instant, so

precisely alike, that the minutest line seemed copied with startling accuracy!

Oliver knew not the cause of this sudden exclamation; for, not being strong enough to bear the start it gave him, he fainted away. A weakness on his part, which affords the narrative an opportunity of relieving the reader from suspense, in behalf of the two young pupils of the Merry Old Gentleman; and of recording—

That when the Dodger, and his accomplished friend Master Bates, joined in the hue-and-cry which was raised at Oliver's heels, in consequence of their executing an illegal conveyance of Mr. Brownlow's personal property, as has been already described, they were actuated by a very laudable and becoming regard for themselves; and forasmuch as the freedom of the subject and the liberty of the individual are among the first and proudest boasts of a true-hearted Englishman, so, I need hardly beg the reader to observe, that this action should tend to exalt them in the opinion of all public and patriotic men, in almost as great a degree as this strong proof of their anxiety for their own preservation and safety goes to corroborate and confirm the little code of laws which certain profound and sound-judging philosophers have laid down as the main-springs of all Nature's deeds and actions: the said philosophers very wisely reducing the good lady's proceedings to matters of maxim and theory: and, by a very neat and pretty compliment to her exalted wisdom and understanding, putting entirely out of sight any considerations of heart, or generous impulse and feeling. For, these are matters totally beneath a female who is acknowledged by universal admission to be far above the numerous little foibles and weaknesses of her sex.

If I wanted any further proof of the strictly philosophical nature of the conduct of these young gentlemen in their very delicate predicament, I should at once find it in the fact (also recorded in a foregoing part of this narrative), of their quitting the pursuit, when the general attention was fixed upon Oliver; and making immediately for their home by the shortest possible cut. Although I do not mean to assert that it is usually the practice of renowned and learned sages, to shorten the road to any great conclusion (their course indeed being rather to lengthen the distance, by various circumlocutions and discursive staggerings, like unto those in which drunken men under the pressure of a too mighty flow of ideas, are prone to

indulge); still, I do mean to say, and do say distinctly, that it is the invariable practice of many mighty philosophers, in carrying out their theories, to evince great wisdom and foresight in providing against every possible contingency which can be supposed at all likely to affect themselves. Thus, to do a great right, you may do a little wrong; and you may take any means which the end to be attained, will justify; the amount of the right, or the amount of the wrong, or indeed the distinction between the two, being left entirely to the philosopher concerned, to be settled and determined by his clear, comprehensive, and impartial view of his own particular case.

It was not until the two boys had scoured, with great rapidity, through a most intricate maze of narrow streets and courts, that they ventured to halt beneath a low and dark archway. Having remained silent here, just long enough to recover breath to speak, Master Bates uttered an exclamation of amusement and delight; and, bursting into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, flung himself upon a doorstep, and rolled thereon in a transport of mirth.

‘What’s the matter?’ inquired the Dodger.

‘Ha! ha! ha!’ roared Charley Bates.

‘Hold your noise,’ remonstrated the Dodger, looking cautiously round. ‘Do you want to be grabbed, stupid?’

‘I can’t help it,’ said Charley, ‘I can’t help it! To see him splitting away at that pace, and cutting round the corners, and knocking up again’ the posts, and starting on again as if he was made of iron as well as them, and me with the wipe in my pocket, singing out arter him—oh, my eye!’ The vivid imagination of Master Bates presented the scene before him in too strong colours. As he arrived at this apostrophe, he again rolled upon the door-step, and laughed louder than before.

‘What’ll Fagin say?’ inquired the Dodger; taking advantage of the next interval of breathlessness on the part of his friend to propound the question.

‘What?’ repeated Charley Bates.

‘Ah, what?’ said the Dodger.

‘Why, what should he say?’ inquired Charley: stopping rather suddenly in his merriment; for the Dodger’s manner was impressive. ‘What should he say?’

Mr. Dawkins whistled for a couple of minutes; then, taking off his hat, scratched his head, and nodded thrice.

‘What do you mean?’ said Charley.

‘Toor rul lol loo, gammon and spinnage, the frog he wouldn’t, and high cockolorum,’ said the Dodger: with a slight sneer on his intellectual countenance.

This was explanatory, but not satisfactory. Master Bates felt it so; and again said, ‘What do you mean?’

The Dodger made no reply; but putting his hat on again, and gathering the skirts of his long-tailed coat under his arm, thrust his tongue into his cheek, slapped the bridge of his nose some half-dozen times in a familiar but expressive manner, and turning on his heel, slunk down the court. Master Bates followed, with a thoughtful countenance.

The noise of footsteps on the creaking stairs, a few minutes after the occurrence of this conversation, roused the merry old gentleman as he sat over the fire with a saveloy and a small loaf in his hand; a pocket-knife in his right; and a pewter pot on the trivet. There was a rascally smile on his white face as he turned round, and looking sharply out from under his thick red eyebrows, bent his ear towards the door, and listened.

‘Why, how’s this?’ muttered the Jew: changing countenance; ‘only two of ’em? Where’s the third? They can’t have got into trouble. Hark!’

The footsteps approached nearer; they reached the landing. The door was slowly opened; and the Dodger and Charley Bates entered, closing it behind them.

CHAPTER XIII

‘WHERE’S OLIVER?’ SAID THE Jew, rising with a menacing look. ‘Where’s the boy?’

The young thieves eyed their preceptor as if they were alarmed at his violence; and looked uneasily at each other. But they made no reply.

‘What’s become of the boy?’ said the Jew, seizing the Dodger tightly by the collar, and threatening him with horrid imprecations. ‘Speak out, or I’ll throttle you!’

Mr. Fagin looked so very much in earnest, that Charley Bates, who deemed it prudent in all cases to be on the safe side, and who conceived it by no means improbable that it might be his turn to be throttled second, dropped upon his knees, and raised a loud, well-sustained, and continuous roar—something between a mad bull and a speaking trumpet.

‘Will you speak?’ thundered the Jew: shaking the Dodger so much that his keeping in the big coat at all, seemed perfectly miraculous.

‘Why, the traps have got him, and that’s all about it,’ said the Dodger, sullenly. ‘Come, let go o’ me, will you!’ And, swinging himself, at one jerk, clean out of the big coat, which he left in the Jew’s hands, the Dodger snatched up the toasting fork, and made a pass at the merry old gentleman’s waistcoat; which, if it had taken effect, would have let a little more merriment out than could have been easily replaced.

The Jew stepped back in this emergency, with more agility than could have been anticipated in a man of his apparent decrepitude; and, seizing up the pot, prepared to hurl it at his assailant’s head. But Charley Bates, at this moment, calling his attention by a perfectly terrific howl, he suddenly altered its destination, and flung it full at that young gentleman.

‘Why, what the blazes is in the wind now!’ growled a deep voice. ‘Who pitched that ’ere at me? It’s well it’s the beer, and not the pot, as hit me, or

I’d have settled somebody. I might have know’d, as nobody but an infernal, rich, plundering, thundering old Jew could afford to throw away any drink but water—and not that, unless he done the River Company every quarter. Wot’s it all about, Fagin? D—me, if my neck-handkercher an’t lined with beer! Come in, you sneaking warmint; wot are you stopping outside for, as if you was ashamed of your master! Come in!’

The man who growled out these words, was a stoutly-built fellow of about five-and-thirty, in a black velveteen coat, very soiled drab breeches, lace-up half boots, and grey cotton stockings which inclosed a bulky pair of legs, with large swelling calves;—the kind of legs, which in such costume, always look in an unfinished and incomplete state without a set of fetters to garnish them. He had a brown hat on his head, and a dirty belcher handkerchief round his neck: with the long frayed ends of which he smeared the beer from his face as he spoke. He disclosed, when he had done so, a broad heavy countenance with a beard of three days’ growth, and two scowling eyes; one of which displayed various parti-coloured symptoms of having been recently damaged by a blow.

‘Come in, d’ye hear?’ growled this engaging ruffian.

A white shaggy dog, with his face scratched and torn in twenty different places, skulked into the room.

‘Why didn’t you come in afore?’ said the man. ‘You’re getting too proud to own me afore company, are you? Lie down!’

This command was accompanied with a kick, which sent the animal to the other end of the room. He appeared well used to it, however; for he coiled himself up in a corner very quietly, without uttering a sound, and winking his very ill-looking eyes twenty times in a minute, appeared to occupy himself in taking a survey of the apartment.

‘What are you up to? Ill-treating the boys, you covetous, avaricious, in-sa-ti-a-ble old fence?’ said the man, seating himself deliberately. ‘I wonder they don’t murder you! I would if I was them. If I’d been your ’prentice, I’d have done it long ago, and—no, I couldn’t have sold you afterwards, for you’re fit for nothing but keeping as a curiousity of ugliness in a glass bottle, and I suppose they don’t blow glass bottles large enough.’

‘Hush! hush! Mr. Sikes,’ said the Jew, trembling; ‘don’t speak so loud!’

‘None of your mistering,’ replied the ruffian; ‘you always mean mischief when you come that. You know my name: out with it! I shan’t disgrace it

when the time comes.’

‘Well, well, then—Bill Sikes,’ said the Jew, with abject humility. ‘You seem out of humour, Bill.’

‘Perhaps I am,’ replied Sikes; ‘I should think you was rather out of sorts too, unless you mean as little harm when you throw pewter pots about, as you do when you blab and—’

‘Are you mad?’ said the Jew, catching the man by the sleeve, and pointing towards the boys.

Mr. Sikes contented himself with tying an imaginary knot under his left ear, and jerking his head over on the right shoulder; a piece of dumb show which the Jew appeared to understand perfectly. He then, in cant terms, with which his whole conversation was plentifully besprinkled, but which would be quite unintelligible if they were recorded here, demanded a glass of liquor.

‘And mind you don’t poison it,’ said Mr. Sikes, laying his hat upon the table.

This was said in jest; but if the speaker could have seen the evil leer with which the Jew bit his pale lip as he turned round to the cupboard, he might have thought the caution not wholly unnecessary, or the wish (at all events) to improve upon the distiller’s ingenuity not very far from the old gentleman’s merry heart.

After swallowing two of three glasses of spirits, Mr. Sikes condescended to take some notice of the young gentlemen; which gracious act led to a conversation, in which the cause and manner of Oliver’s capture were circumstantially detailed, with such alterations and improvements on the truth, as to the Dodger appeared most advisable under the circumstances.

‘I’m afraid,’ said the Jew, ‘that he may say something which will get us into trouble.’

‘That’s very likely,’ returned Sikes with a malicious grin. ‘You’re blowed upon, Fagin.’

‘And I’m afraid, you see,’ added the Jew, speaking as if he had not noticed the interruption; and regarding the other closely as he did so,—‘I’m afraid that, if the game was up with us, it might be up with a good many more, and that it would come out rather worse for you than it would for me, my dear.’

The man started, and turned round upon the Jew. But the old gentleman’s

shoulders were shrugged up to his ears; and his eyes were vacantly staring on the opposite wall.

There was a long pause. Every member of the respectable coterie appeared plunged in his own reflections; not excepting the dog, who by a certain malicious licking of his lips seemed to be meditating an attack upon the legs of the first gentleman or lady he might encounter in the streets when he went out.

‘Somebody must find out wot’s been done at the office,’ said Mr. Sikes in a much lower tone than he had taken since he came in.

The Jew nodded assent.

‘If he hasn’t peached, and is committed, there’s no fear till he comes out again,’ said Mr. Sikes, ‘and then he must be taken care on. You must get hold of him somehow.’

Again the Jew nodded.

The prudence of this line of action, indeed, was obvious; but, unfortunately, there was one very strong objection to its being adopted. This was, that the Dodger, and Charley Bates, and Fagin, and Mr. William Sikes, happened, one and all, to entertain a violent and deeply-rooted antipathy to going near a police-office on any ground or pretext whatever.

How long they might have sat and looked at each other, in a state of uncertainty not the most pleasant of its kind, it is difficult to guess. It is not necessary to make any guesses on the subject, however; for the sudden entrance of the two young ladies whom Oliver had seen on a former occasion, caused the conversation to flow afresh.

‘The very thing!’ said the Jew. ‘Bet will go; won’t you, my dear?’

‘Wheres?’ inquired the young lady.

‘Only just up to the office, my dear,’ said the Jew coaxingly.

It is due to the young lady to say that she did not positively affirm that she would not, but that she merely expressed an emphatic and earnest desire to be ‘blessed’ if she would; a polite and delicate evasion of the request, which shows the young lady to have been possessed of that natural good breeding which cannot bear to inflict upon a fellow-creature, the pain of a direct and pointed refusal.

The Jew’s countenance fell. He turned from this young lady, who was gaily, not to say gorgeously attired, in a red gown, green boots, and yellow curl-papers, to the other female.

‘Nancy, my dear,’ said the Jew in a soothing manner, ‘what do YOU say?’

‘That it won’t do; so it’s no use a-trying it on, Fagin,’ replied Nancy.

‘What do you mean by that?’ said Mr. Sikes, looking up in a surly manner.

‘What I say, Bill,’ replied the lady collectedly.

‘Why, you’re just the very person for it,’ reasoned Mr. Sikes: ‘nobody about here knows anything of you.’

‘And as I don’t want ’em to, neither,’ replied Nancy in the same composed manner, ‘it’s rather more no than yes with me, Bill.’

‘She’ll go, Fagin,’ said Sikes.

‘No, she won’t, Fagin,’ said Nancy.

‘Yes, she will, Fagin,’ said Sikes.

And Mr. Sikes was right. By dint of alternate threats, promises, and bribes, the lady in question was ultimately prevailed upon to undertake the commission. She was not, indeed, withheld by the same considerations as her agreeable friend; for, having recently removed into the neighborhood of Field Lane from the remote but genteel suburb of Ratcliffe, she was not under the same apprehension of being recognised by any of her numerous acquaintances.

Accordingly, with a clean white apron tied over her gown, and her curl-papers tucked up under a straw bonnet,—both articles of dress being provided from the Jew’s inexhaustible stock,—Miss Nancy prepared to issue forth on her errand.

‘Stop a minute, my dear,’ said the Jew, producing, a little covered basket. ‘Carry that in one hand. It looks more respectable, my dear.’

‘Give her a door-key to carry in her t’other one, Fagin,’ said Sikes; ‘it looks real and genivine like.’

‘Yes, yes, my dear, so it does,’ said the Jew, hanging a large street-door key on the forefinger of the young lady’s right hand.

‘There; very good! Very good indeed, my dear!’ said the Jew, rubbing his hands.

‘Oh, my brother! My poor, dear, sweet, innocent little brother!’ exclaimed Nancy, bursting into tears, and wringing the little basket and the street-door key in an agony of distress. ‘What has become of him! Where have they taken him to! Oh, do have pity, and tell me what’s been done with

the dear boy, gentlemen; do, gentlemen, if you please, gentlemen!'

Having uttered those words in a most lamentable and heart-broken tone: to the immeasurable delight of her hearers: Miss Nancy paused, winked to the company, nodded smilingly round, and disappeared.

'Ah, she's a clever girl, my dears,' said the Jew, turning round to his young friends, and shaking his head gravely, as if in mute admonition to them to follow the bright example they had just beheld.

'She's a honour to her sex,' said Mr. Sikes, filling his glass, and smiting the table with his enormous fist. 'Here's her health, and wishing they was all like her!'

While these, and many other encomiums, were being passed on the accomplished Nancy, that young lady made the best of her way to the police-office; whither, notwithstanding a little natural timidity consequent upon walking through the streets alone and unprotected, she arrived in perfect safety shortly afterwards.

Entering by the back way, she tapped softly with the key at one of the cell-doors, and listened. There was no sound within: so she coughed and listened again. Still there was no reply: so she spoke.

'Nolly, dear?' murmured Nancy in a gentle voice; 'Nolly?'

There was nobody inside but a miserable shoeless criminal, who had been taken up for playing the flute, and who, the offence against society having been clearly proved, had been very properly committed by Mr. Fang to the House of Correction for one month; with the appropriate and amusing remark that since he had so much breath to spare, it would be more wholesomely expended on the treadmill than in a musical instrument. He made no answer: being occupied mentally bewailing the loss of the flute, which had been confiscated for the use of the county: so Nancy passed on to the next cell, and knocked there.

'Well!' cried a faint and feeble voice.

'Is there a little boy here?' inquired Nancy, with a preliminary sob.

'No,' replied the voice; 'God forbid.'

This was a vagrant of sixty-five, who was going to prison for *not* playing the flute; or, in other words, for begging in the streets, and doing nothing for his livelihood. In the next cell was another man, who was going to the same prison for hawking tin saucepans without license; thereby doing something for his living, in defiance of the Stamp-office.

But, as neither of these criminals answered to the name of Oliver, or knew anything about him, Nancy made straight up to the bluff officer in the striped waistcoat; and with the most piteous wailings and lamentations, rendered more piteous by a prompt and efficient use of the street-door key and the little basket, demanded her own dear brother.

‘I haven’t got him, my dear,’ said the old man.

‘Where is he?’ screamed Nancy, in a distracted manner.

‘Why, the gentleman’s got him,’ replied the officer.

‘What gentleman! Oh, gracious heavens! What gentleman?’ exclaimed Nancy.

In reply to this incoherent questioning, the old man informed the deeply affected sister that Oliver had been taken ill in the office, and discharged in consequence of a witness having proved the robbery to have been committed by another boy, not in custody; and that the prosecutor had carried him away, in an insensible condition, to his own residence: of and concerning which, all the informant knew was, that it was somewhere in Pentonville, he having heard that word mentioned in the directions to the coachman.

In a dreadful state of doubt and uncertainty, the agonised young woman staggered to the gate, and then, exchanging her faltering walk for a swift run, returned by the most devious and complicated route she could think of, to the domicile of the Jew.

Mr. Bill Sikes no sooner heard the account of the expedition delivered, than he very hastily called up the white dog, and, putting on his hat, expeditiously departed: without devoting any time to the formality of wishing the company good-morning.

‘We must know where he is, my dears; he must be found,’ said the Jew greatly excited. ‘Charley, do nothing but skulk about, till you bring home some news of him! Nancy, my dear, I must have him found. I trust to you, my dear,—to you and the Artful for everything! Stay, stay,’ added the Jew, unlocking a drawer with a shaking hand; ‘there’s money, my dears. I shall shut up this shop to-night. You’ll know where to find me! Don’t stop here a minute. Not an instant, my dears!’

With these words, he pushed them from the room: and carefully double-locking and barring the door behind them, drew from its place of concealment the box which he had unintentionally disclosed to Oliver.

Then, he hastily proceeded to dispose the watches and jewellery beneath his clothing.

A rap at the door startled him in this occupation. ‘Who’s there?’ he cried in a shrill tone.

‘Me!’ replied the voice of the Dodger, through the key-hole.

‘What now?’ cried the Jew impatiently.

‘Is he to be kidnapped to the other ken, Nancy says?’ inquired the Dodger.

‘Yes,’ replied the Jew, ‘wherever she lays hands on him. Find him, find him out, that’s all. I shall know what to do next; never fear.’

The boy murmured a reply of intelligence: and hurried downstairs after his companions.

‘He has not peached so far,’ said the Jew as he pursued his occupation. ‘If he means to blab us among his new friends, we may stop his mouth yet.’

CHAPTER XIV

OLIVER SOON RECOVERING FROM the fainting-fit into which Mr. Brownlow's abrupt exclamation had thrown him, the subject of the picture was carefully avoided, both by the old gentleman and Mrs. Bedwin, in the conversation that ensued: which indeed bore no reference to Oliver's history or prospects, but was confined to such topics as might amuse without exciting him. He was still too weak to get up to breakfast; but, when he came down into the housekeeper's room next day, his first act was to cast an eager glance at the wall, in the hope of again looking on the face of the beautiful lady. His expectations were disappointed, however, for the picture had been removed.

'Ah!' said the housekeeper, watching the direction of Oliver's eyes. 'It is gone, you see.'

'I see it is ma'am,' replied Oliver. 'Why have they taken it away?'

'It has been taken down, child, because Mr. Brownlow said, that as it seemed to worry you, perhaps it might prevent your getting well, you know,' rejoined the old lady.

'Oh, no, indeed. It didn't worry me, ma'am,' said Oliver. 'I liked to see it. I quite loved it.'

'Well, well!' said the old lady, good-humouredly; 'you get well as fast as ever you can, dear, and it shall be hung up again. There! I promise you that! Now, let us talk about something else.'

This was all the information Oliver could obtain about the picture at that time. As the old lady had been so kind to him in his illness, he endeavoured to think no more of the subject just then; so he listened attentively to a great many stories she told him, about an amiable and handsome daughter of hers, who was married to an amiable and handsome man, and lived in the country; and about a son, who was clerk to a merchant in the West Indies;

and who was, also, such a good young man, and wrote such dutiful letters home four times a-year, that it brought the tears into her eyes to talk about them. When the old lady had expatiated, a long time, on the excellences of her children, and the merits of her kind good husband besides, who had been dead and gone, poor dear soul! just six-and-twenty years, it was time to have tea. After tea she began to teach Oliver cribbage: which he learnt as quickly as she could teach: and at which game they played, with great interest and gravity, until it was time for the invalid to have some warm wine and water, with a slice of dry toast, and then to go cosily to bed.

They were happy days, those of Oliver's recovery. Everything was so quiet, and neat, and orderly; everybody so kind and gentle; that after the noise and turbulence in the midst of which he had always lived, it seemed like Heaven itself. He was no sooner strong enough to put his clothes on, properly, than Mr. Brownlow caused a complete new suit, and a new cap, and a new pair of shoes, to be provided for him. As Oliver was told that he might do what he liked with the old clothes, he gave them to a servant who had been very kind to him, and asked her to sell them to a Jew, and keep the money for herself. This she very readily did; and, as Oliver looked out of the parlour window, and saw the Jew roll them up in his bag and walk away, he felt quite delighted to think that they were safely gone, and that there was now no possible danger of his ever being able to wear them again. They were sad rags, to tell the truth; and Oliver had never had a new suit before.

One evening, about a week after the affair of the picture, as he was sitting talking to Mrs. Bedwin, there came a message down from Mr. Brownlow, that if Oliver Twist felt pretty well, he should like to see him in his study, and talk to him a little while.

'Bless us, and save us! Wash your hands, and let me part your hair nicely for you, child,' said Mrs. Bedwin. 'Dear heart alive! If we had known he would have asked for you, we would have put you a clean collar on, and made you as smart as sixpence!'

Oliver did as the old lady bade him; and, although she lamented grievously, meanwhile, that there was not even time to crimp the little frill that bordered his shirt-collar; he looked so delicate and handsome, despite that important personal advantage, that she went so far as to say: looking at him with great complacency from head to foot, that she really didn't think it

would have been possible, on the longest notice, to have made much difference in him for the better.

Thus encouraged, Oliver tapped at the study door. On Mr. Brownlow calling to him to come in, he found himself in a little back room, quite full of books, with a window, looking into some pleasant little gardens. There was a table drawn up before the window, at which Mr. Brownlow was seated reading. When he saw Oliver, he pushed the book away from him, and told him to come near the table, and sit down. Oliver complied; marvelling where the people could be found to read such a great number of books as seemed to be written to make the world wiser. Which is still a marvel to more experienced people than Oliver Twist, every day of their lives.

‘There are a good many books, are there not, my boy?’ said Mr. Brownlow, observing the curiosity with which Oliver surveyed the shelves that reached from the floor to the ceiling.

‘A great number, sir,’ replied Oliver. ‘I never saw so many.’

‘You shall read them, if you behave well,’ said the old gentleman kindly; ‘and you will like that, better than looking at the outsides,—that is, some cases; because there are books of which the backs and covers are by far the best parts.’

‘I suppose they are those heavy ones, sir,’ said Oliver, pointing to some large quartos, with a good deal of gilding about the binding.

‘Not always those,’ said the old gentleman, patting Oliver on the head, and smiling as he did so; ‘there are other equally heavy ones, though of a much smaller size. How should you like to grow up a clever man, and write books, eh?’

‘I think I would rather read them, sir,’ replied Oliver.

‘What! wouldn’t you like to be a book-writer?’ said the old gentleman.

Oliver considered a little while; and at last said, he should think it would be a much better thing to be a book-seller; upon which the old gentleman laughed heartily, and declared he had said a very good thing. Which Oliver felt glad to have done, though he by no means knew what it was.

‘Well, well,’ said the old gentleman, composing his features. ‘Don’t be afraid! We won’t make an author of you, while there’s an honest trade to be learnt, or brick-making to turn to.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Oliver. At the earnest manner of his reply, the old

gentleman laughed again; and said something about a curious instinct, which Oliver, not understanding, paid no very great attention to.

‘Now,’ said Mr. Brownlow, speaking if possible in a kinder, but at the same time in a much more serious manner, than Oliver had ever known him assume yet, ‘I want you to pay great attention, my boy, to what I am going to say. I shall talk to you without any reserve; because I am sure you are well able to understand me, as many older persons would be.’

‘Oh, don’t tell you are going to send me away, sir, pray!’ exclaimed Oliver, alarmed at the serious tone of the old gentleman’s commencement! ‘Don’t turn me out of doors to wander in the streets again. Let me stay here, and be a servant. Don’t send me back to the wretched place I came from. Have mercy upon a poor boy, sir!’

‘My dear child,’ said the old gentleman, moved by the warmth of Oliver’s sudden appeal; ‘you need not be afraid of my deserting you, unless you give me cause.’

‘I never, never will, sir,’ interposed Oliver.

‘I hope not,’ rejoined the old gentleman. ‘I do not think you ever will. I have been deceived, before, in the objects whom I have endeavoured to benefit; but I feel strongly disposed to trust you, nevertheless; and I am more interested in your behalf than I can well account for, even to myself. The persons on whom I have bestowed my dearest love, lie deep in their graves; but, although the happiness and delight of my life lie buried there too, I have not made a coffin of my heart, and sealed it up, forever, on my best affections. Deep affliction has but strengthened and refined them.’

As the old gentleman said this in a low voice: more to himself than to his companion: and as he remained silent for a short time afterwards: Oliver sat quite still.

‘Well, well!’ said the old gentleman at length, in a more cheerful tone, ‘I only say this, because you have a young heart; and knowing that I have suffered great pain and sorrow, you will be more careful, perhaps, not to wound me again. You say you are an orphan, without a friend in the world; all the inquiries I have been able to make, confirm the statement. Let me hear your story; where you come from; who brought you up; and how you got into the company in which I found you. Speak the truth, and you shall not be friendless while I live.’

Oliver’s sobs checked his utterance for some minutes; when he was on

the point of beginning to relate how he had been brought up at the farm, and carried to the workhouse by Mr. Bumble, a peculiarly impatient little double-knock was heard at the street-door: and the servant, running upstairs, announced Mr. Grimwig.

'Is he coming up?' inquired Mr. Brownlow.

'Yes, sir,' replied the servant. 'He asked if there were any muffins in the house; and, when I told him yes, he said he had come to tea.'

Mr. Brownlow smiled; and, turning to Oliver, said that Mr. Grimwig was an old friend of his, and he must not mind his being a little rough in his manners; for he was a worthy creature at bottom, as he had reason to know.

'Shall I go downstairs, sir?' inquired Oliver.

'No,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'I would rather you remained here.'

At this moment, there walked into the room: supporting himself by a thick stick: a stout old gentleman, rather lame in one leg, who was dressed in a blue coat, striped waistcoat, nankeen breeches and gaiters, and a broad-brimmed white hat, with the sides turned up with green. A very small-plaited shirt frill stuck out from his waistcoat; and a very long steel watch-chain, with nothing but a key at the end, dangled loosely below it. The ends of his white neckerchief were twisted into a ball about the size of an orange; the variety of shapes into which his countenance was twisted, defy description. He had a manner of screwing his head on one side when he spoke; and of looking out of the corners of his eyes at the same time: which irresistibly reminded the beholder of a parrot. In this attitude, he fixed himself, the moment he made his appearance; and, holding out a small piece of orange-peel at arm's length, exclaimed, in a growling, discontented voice.

'Look here! do you see this! Isn't it a most wonderful and extraordinary thing that I can't call at a man's house but I find a piece of this poor surgeon's friend on the staircase? I've been lamed with orange-peel once, and I know orange-peel will be my death, or I'll be content to eat my own head, sir!'

This was the handsome offer with which Mr. Grimwig backed and confirmed nearly every assertion he made; and it was the more singular in his case, because, even admitting for the sake of argument, the possibility of scientific improvements being brought to that pass which will enable a gentleman to eat his own head in the event of his being so disposed, Mr.

Grimwig's head was such a particularly large one, that the most sanguine man alive could hardly entertain a hope of being able to get through it at a sitting—to put entirely out of the question, a very thick coating of powder.

'I'll eat my head, sir,' repeated Mr. Grimwig, striking his stick upon the ground. 'Hallo! what's that!' looking at Oliver, and retreating a pace or two.

'This is young Oliver Twist, whom we were speaking about,' said Mr. Brownlow.

Oliver bowed.

'You don't mean to say that's the boy who had the fever, I hope?' said Mr. Grimwig, recoiling a little more. 'Wait a minute! Don't speak! Stop—' continued Mr. Grimwig, abruptly, losing all dread of the fever in his triumph at the discovery; 'that's the boy who had the orange! If that's not the boy, sir, who had the orange, and threw this bit of peel upon the staircase, I'll eat my head, and his too.'

'No, no, he has not had one,' said Mr. Brownlow, laughing. 'Come! Put down your hat; and speak to my young friend.'

'I feel strongly on this subject, sir,' said the irritable old gentleman, drawing off his gloves. 'There's always more or less orange-peel on the pavement in our street; and I *know* it's put there by the surgeon's boy at the corner. A young woman stumbled over a bit last night, and fell against my garden-railings; directly she got up I saw her look towards his infernal red lamp with the pantomime-light. "Don't go to him," I called out of the window, "he's an assassin! A man-trap!" So he is. If he is not—' Here the irascible old gentleman gave a great knock on the ground with his stick; which was always understood, by his friends, to imply the customary offer, whenever it was not expressed in words. Then, still keeping his stick in his hand, he sat down; and, opening a double eye-glass, which he wore attached to a broad black riband, took a view of Oliver: who, seeing that he was the object of inspection, coloured, and bowed again.

'That's the boy, is it?' said Mr. Grimwig, at length.

'That's the boy,' replied Mr. Brownlow.

'How are you, boy?' said Mr. Grimwig.

'A great deal better, thank you, sir,' replied Oliver.

Mr. Brownlow, seeming to apprehend that his singular friend was about to say something disagreeable, asked Oliver to step downstairs and tell Mrs. Bedwin they were ready for tea; which, as he did not half like the visitor's

manner, he was very happy to do.

‘He is a nice-looking boy, is he not?’ inquired Mr. Brownlow.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Mr. Grimwig, pettishly.

‘Don’t know?’

‘No. I don’t know. I never see any difference in boys. I only knew two sort of boys. Mealy boys, and beef-faced boys.’

‘And which is Oliver?’

‘Mealy. I know a friend who has a beef-faced boy; a fine boy, they call him; with a round head, and red cheeks, and glaring eyes; a horrid boy; with a body and limbs that appear to be swelling out of the seams of his blue clothes; with the voice of a pilot, and the appetite of a wolf. I know him! The wretch!’

‘Come,’ said Mr. Brownlow, ‘these are not the characteristics of young Oliver Twist; so he needn’t excite your wrath.’

‘They are not,’ replied Mr. Grimwig. ‘He may have worse.’

Here, Mr. Brownlow coughed impatiently; which appeared to afford Mr. Grimwig the most exquisite delight.

‘He may have worse, I say,’ repeated Mr. Grimwig. ‘Where does he come from! Who is he? What is he? He has had a fever. What of that? Fevers are not peculiar to good people; are they? Bad people have fevers sometimes; haven’t they, eh? I knew a man who was hung in Jamaica for murdering his master. He had had a fever six times; he wasn’t recommended to mercy on that account. Pooh! nonsense!’

Now, the fact was, that in the inmost recesses of his own heart, Mr. Grimwig was strongly disposed to admit that Oliver’s appearance and manner were unusually prepossessing; but he had a strong appetite for contradiction, sharpened on this occasion by the finding of the orange-peel; and, inwardly determining that no man should dictate to him whether a boy was well-looking or not, he had resolved, from the first, to oppose his friend. When Mr. Brownlow admitted that on no one point of inquiry could he yet return a satisfactory answer; and that he had postponed any investigation into Oliver’s previous history until he thought the boy was strong enough to hear it; Mr. Grimwig chuckled maliciously. And he demanded, with a sneer, whether the housekeeper was in the habit of counting the plate at night; because if she didn’t find a table-spoon or two missing some sunshiny morning, why, he would be content to—and so

forth.

All this, Mr. Brownlow, although himself somewhat of an impetuous gentleman: knowing his friend's peculiarities, bore with great good humour; as Mr. Grimwig, at tea, was graciously pleased to express his entire approval of the muffins, matters went on very smoothly; and Oliver, who made one of the party, began to feel more at his ease than he had yet done in the fierce old gentleman's presence.

'And when are you going to hear a full, true, and particular account of the life and adventures of Oliver Twist?' asked Grimwig of Mr. Brownlow, at the conclusion of the meal; looking sideways at Oliver, as he resumed his subject.

'To-morrow morning,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'I would rather he was alone with me at the time. Come up to me to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, my dear.'

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver. He answered with some hesitation, because he was confused by Mr. Grimwig's looking so hard at him.

'I'll tell you what,' whispered that gentleman to Mr. Brownlow; 'he won't come up to you to-morrow morning. I saw him hesitate. He is deceiving you, my good friend.'

'I'll swear he is not,' replied Mr. Brownlow, warmly.

'If he is not,' said Mr. Grimwig, 'I'll—' and down went the stick.

'I'll answer for that boy's truth with my life!' said Mr. Brownlow, knocking the table.

'And I for his falsehood with my head!' rejoined Mr. Grimwig, knocking the table also.

'We shall see,' said Mr. Brownlow, checking his rising anger.

'We will,' replied Mr. Grimwig, with a provoking smile; 'we will.'

As fate would have it, Mrs. Bedwin chanced to bring in, at this moment, a small parcel of books, which Mr. Brownlow had that morning purchased of the identical bookstall-keeper, who has already figured in this history; having laid them on the table, she prepared to leave the room.

'Stop the boy, Mrs. Bedwin!' said Mr. Brownlow; 'there is something to go back.'

'He has gone, sir,' replied Mrs. Bedwin.

'Call after him,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'it's particular. He is a poor man, and they are not paid for. There are some books to be taken back, too.'

The street-door was opened. Oliver ran one way; and the girl ran another; and Mrs. Bedwin stood on the step and screamed for the boy; but there was no boy in sight. Oliver and the girl returned, in a breathless state, to report that there were no tidings of him.

‘Dear me, I am very sorry for that,’ exclaimed Mr. Brownlow; ‘I particularly wished those books to be returned to-night.’

‘Send Oliver with them,’ said Mr. Grimwig, with an ironical smile; ‘he will be sure to deliver them safely, you know.’

‘Yes; do let me take them, if you please, sir,’ said Oliver. ‘I’ll run all the way, sir.’

The old gentleman was just going to say that Oliver should not go out on any account; when a most malicious cough from Mr. Grimwig determined him that he should; and that, by his prompt discharge of the commission, he should prove to him the injustice of his suspicions: on this head at least: at once.

‘You *shall* go, my dear,’ said the old gentleman. ‘The books are on a chair by my table. Fetch them down.’

Oliver, delighted to be of use, brought down the books under his arm in a great bustle; and waited, cap in hand, to hear what message he was to take.

‘You are to say,’ said Mr. Brownlow, glancing steadily at Grimwig; ‘you are to say that you have brought those books back; and that you have come to pay the four pound ten I owe him. This is a five-pound note, so you will have to bring me back, ten shillings change.’

‘I won’t be ten minutes, sir,’ said Oliver, eagerly. Having buttoned up the bank-note in his jacket pocket, and placed the books carefully under his arm, he made a respectful bow, and left the room. Mrs. Bedwin followed him to the street-door, giving him many directions about the nearest way, and the name of the bookseller, and the name of the street: all of which Oliver said he clearly understood. Having superadded many injunctions to be sure and not take cold, the old lady at length permitted him to depart.

‘Bless his sweet face!’ said the old lady, looking after him. ‘I can’t bear, somehow, to let him go out of my sight.’

At this moment, Oliver looked gaily round, and nodded before he turned the corner. The old lady smilingly returned his salutation, and, closing the door, went back to her own room.

‘Let me see; he’ll be back in twenty minutes, at the longest,’ said Mr.

Brownlow, pulling out his watch, and placing it on the table. ‘It will be dark by that time.’

‘Oh! you really expect him to come back, do you?’ inquired Mr. Grimwig.

‘Don’t you?’ asked Mr. Brownlow, smiling.

The spirit of contradiction was strong in Mr. Grimwig’s breast, at the moment; and it was rendered stronger by his friend’s confident smile.

‘No,’ he said, smiting the table with his fist, ‘I do not. The boy has a new suit of clothes on his back, a set of valuable books under his arm, and a five-pound note in his pocket. He’ll join his old friends the thieves, and laugh at you. If ever that boy returns to this house, sir, I’ll eat my head.’

With these words he drew his chair closer to the table; and there the two friends sat, in silent expectation, with the watch between them.

It is worthy of remark, as illustrating the importance we attach to our own judgments, and the pride with which we put forth our most rash and hasty conclusions, that, although Mr. Grimwig was not by any means a bad-hearted man, and though he would have been unfeignedly sorry to see his respected friend duped and deceived, he really did most earnestly and strongly hope at that moment, that Oliver Twist might not come back.

It grew so dark, that the figures on the dial-plate were scarcely discernible; but there the two old gentlemen continued to sit, in silence, with the watch between them.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE OBSCURE PARLOUR of a low public-house, in the filthiest part of Little Saffron Hill; a dark and gloomy den, where a flaring gas-light burnt all day in the winter-time; and where no ray of sun ever shone in the summer: there sat, brooding over a little pewter measure and a small glass, strongly impregnated with the smell of liquor, a man in a velveteen coat, drab shorts, half-boots and stockings, whom even by that dim light no experienced agent of the police would have hesitated to recognise as Mr. William Sikes. At his feet, sat a white-coated, red-eyed dog; who occupied himself, alternately, in winking at his master with both eyes at the same time; and in licking a large, fresh cut on one side of his mouth, which appeared to be the result of some recent conflict.

‘Keep quiet, you warmint! Keep quiet!’ said Mr. Sikes, suddenly breaking silence. Whether his meditations were so intense as to be disturbed by the dog’s winking, or whether his feelings were so wrought upon by his reflections that they required all the relief derivable from kicking an unoffending animal to allay them, is matter for argument and consideration. Whatever was the cause, the effect was a kick and a curse, bestowed upon the dog simultaneously.

Dogs are not generally apt to revenge injuries inflicted upon them by their masters; but Mr. Sikes’s dog, having faults of temper in common with his owner, and labouring, perhaps, at this moment, under a powerful sense of injury, made no more ado but at once fixed his teeth in one of the half-boots. Having given in a hearty shake, he retired, growling, under a form; just escaping the pewter measure which Mr. Sikes levelled at his head.

‘You would, would you?’ said Sikes, seizing the poker in one hand, and deliberately opening with the other a large clasp-knife, which he drew from his pocket. ‘Come here, you born devil! Come here! D’ye hear?’

The dog no doubt heard; because Mr. Sikes spoke in the very harshest key of a very harsh voice; but, appearing to entertain some unaccountable objection to having his throat cut, he remained where he was, and growled more fiercely than before: at the same time grasping the end of the poker between his teeth, and biting at it like a wild beast.

This resistance only infuriated Mr. Sikes the more; who, dropping on his knees, began to assail the animal most furiously. The dog jumped from right to left, and from left to right; snapping, growling, and barking; the man thrust and swore, and struck and blasphemed; and the struggle was reaching a most critical point for one or other; when, the door suddenly opening, the dog darted out: leaving Bill Sikes with the poker and the clasp-knife in his hands.

There must always be two parties to a quarrel, says the old adage. Mr. Sikes, being disappointed of the dog's participation, at once transferred his share in the quarrel to the new comer.

'What the devil do you come in between me and my dog for?' said Sikes, with a fierce gesture.

'I didn't know, my dear, I didn't know,' replied Fagin, humbly; for the Jew was the new comer.

'Didn't know, you white-livered thief!' growled Sikes. 'Couldn't you hear the noise?'

'Not a sound of it, as I'm a living man, Bill,' replied the Jew.

'Oh no! You hear nothing, you don't,' retorted Sikes with a fierce sneer. 'Sneaking in and out, so as nobody hears how you come or go! I wish you had been the dog, Fagin, half a minute ago.'

'Why?' inquired the Jew with a forced smile.

''Cause the government, as cares for the lives of such men as you, as haven't half the pluck of curs, lets a man kill a dog how he likes,' replied Sikes, shutting up the knife with a very expressive look; 'that's why.'

The Jew rubbed his hands; and, sitting down at the table, affected to laugh at the pleasantry of his friend. He was obviously very ill at ease, however.

'Grin away,' said Sikes, replacing the poker, and surveying him with savage contempt; 'grin away. You'll never have the laugh at me, though, unless it's behind a nightcap. I've got the upper hand over you, Fagin; and, d—me, I'll keep it. There! If I go, you go; so take care of me.'

‘Well, well, my dear,’ said the Jew, ‘I know all that; we—we—have a mutual interest, Bill,—a mutual interest.’

‘Humph,’ said Sikes, as if he thought the interest lay rather more on the Jew’s side than on his. ‘Well, what have you got to say to me?’

‘It’s all passed safe through the melting-pot,’ replied Fagin, ‘and this is your share. It’s rather more than it ought to be, my dear; but as I know you’ll do me a good turn another time, and—’

‘Stow that gammon,’ interposed the robber, impatiently. ‘Where is it? Hand over!’

‘Yes, yes, Bill; give me time, give me time,’ replied the Jew, soothingly. ‘Here it is! All safe!’ As he spoke, he drew forth an old cotton handkerchief from his breast; and untying a large knot in one corner, produced a small brown-paper packet. Sikes, snatching it from him, hastily opened it; and proceeded to count the sovereigns it contained.

‘This is all, is it?’ inquired Sikes.

‘All,’ replied the Jew.

‘You haven’t opened the parcel and swallowed one or two as you come along, have you?’ inquired Sikes, suspiciously. ‘Don’t put on an injured look at the question; you’ve done it many a time. Jerk the tinkler.’

These words, in plain English, conveyed an injunction to ring the bell. It was answered by another Jew: younger than Fagin, but nearly as vile and repulsive in appearance.

Bill Sikes merely pointed to the empty measure. The Jew, perfectly understanding the hint, retired to fill it: previously exchanging a remarkable look with Fagin, who raised his eyes for an instant, as if in expectation of it, and shook his head in reply; so slightly that the action would have been almost imperceptible to an observant third person. It was lost upon Sikes, who was stooping at the moment to tie the boot-lace which the dog had torn. Possibly, if he had observed the brief interchange of signals, he might have thought that it boded no good to him.

‘Is anybody here, Barney?’ inquired Fagin; speaking, now that that Sikes was looking on, without raising his eyes from the ground.

‘Dot a shoul,’ replied Barney; whose words: whether they came from the heart or not: made their way through the nose.

‘Nobody?’ inquired Fagin, in a tone of surprise: which perhaps might mean that Barney was at liberty to tell the truth.

‘Dobody but Biss Dadsy,’ replied Barney.

‘Nancy!’ exclaimed Sikes. ‘Where? Strike me blind, if I don’t honour that ’ere girl, for her native talents.’

‘She’s bid havid a plate of boiled beef id the bar,’ replied Barney.

‘Send her here,’ said Sikes, pouring out a glass of liquor. ‘Send her here.’

Barney looked timidly at Fagin, as if for permission; the Jew remaining silent, and not lifting his eyes from the ground, he retired; and presently returned, ushering in Nancy; who was decorated with the bonnet, apron, basket, and street-door key, complete.

‘You are on the scent, are you, Nancy?’ inquired Sikes, proffering the glass.

‘Yes, I am, Bill,’ replied the young lady, disposing of its contents; ‘and tired enough of it I am, too. The young brat’s been ill and confined to the crib; and—’

‘Ah, Nancy, dear!’ said Fagin, looking up.

Now, whether a peculiar contraction of the Jew’s red eye-brows, and a half closing of his deeply-set eyes, warned Miss Nancy that she was disposed to be too communicative, is not a matter of much importance. The fact is all we need care for here; and the fact is, that she suddenly checked herself, and with several gracious smiles upon Mr. Sikes, turned the conversation to other matters. In about ten minutes’ time, Mr. Fagin was seized with a fit of coughing; upon which Nancy pulled her shawl over her shoulders, and declared it was time to go. Mr. Sikes, finding that he was walking a short part of her way himself, expressed his intention of accompanying her; they went away together, followed, at a little distant, by the dog, who slunk out of a back-yard as soon as his master was out of sight.

The Jew thrust his head out of the room door when Sikes had left it; looked after him as we walked up the dark passage; shook his clenched fist; muttered a deep curse; and then, with a horrible grin, reseated himself at the table; where he was soon deeply absorbed in the interesting pages of the Hue-and-Cry.

Meanwhile, Oliver Twist, little dreaming that he was within so very short a distance of the merry old gentleman, was on his way to the book-stall. When he got into Clerkenwell, he accidently turned down a by-street

which was not exactly in his way; but not discovering his mistake until he had got half-way down it, and knowing it must lead in the right direction, he did not think it worth while to turn back; and so marched on, as quickly as he could, with the books under his arm.

He was walking along, thinking how happy and contented he ought to feel; and how much he would give for only one look at poor little Dick, who, starved and beaten, might be weeping bitterly at that very moment; when he was startled by a young woman screaming out very loud. ‘Oh, my dear brother!’ And he had hardly looked up, to see what the matter was, when he was stopped by having a pair of arms thrown tight round his neck.

‘Don’t,’ cried Oliver, struggling. ‘Let go of me. Who is it? What are you stopping me for?’

The only reply to this, was a great number of loud lamentations from the young woman who had embraced him; and who had a little basket and a street-door key in her hand.

‘Oh my gracious!’ said the young woman, ‘I have found him! Oh! Oliver! Oliver! Oh you naughty boy, to make me suffer such distress on your account! Come home, dear, come. Oh, I’ve found him. Thank gracious goodness heavins, I’ve found him!’ With these incoherent exclamations, the young woman burst into another fit of crying, and got so dreadfully hysterical, that a couple of women who came up at the moment asked a butcher’s boy with a shiny head of hair anointed with suet, who was also looking on, whether he didn’t think he had better run for the doctor. To which, the butcher’s boy: who appeared of a lounging, not to say indolent disposition: replied, that he thought not.

‘Oh, no, no, never mind,’ said the young woman, grasping Oliver’s hand; ‘I’m better now. Come home directly, you cruel boy! Come!’

‘Oh, ma’am,’ replied the young woman, ‘he ran away, near a month ago, from his parents, who are hard-working and respectable people; and went and joined a set of thieves and bad characters; and almost broke his mother’s heart.’

‘Young wretch!’ said one woman.

‘Go home, do, you little brute,’ said the other.

‘I am not,’ replied Oliver, greatly alarmed. ‘I don’t know her. I haven’t any sister, or father and mother either. I’m an orphan; I live at Pentonville.’

‘Only hear him, how he braves it out!’ cried the young woman.

‘Why, it’s Nancy!’ exclaimed Oliver; who now saw her face for the first time; and started back, in irrepressible astonishment.

‘You see he knows me!’ cried Nancy, appealing to the bystanders. ‘He can’t help himself. Make him come home, there’s good people, or he’ll kill his dear mother and father, and break my heart!’

‘What the devil’s this?’ said a man, bursting out of a beer-shop, with a white dog at his heels; ‘young Oliver! Come home to your poor mother, you young dog! Come home directly.’

‘I don’t belong to them. I don’t know them. Help! help!’ cried Oliver, struggling in the man’s powerful grasp.

‘Help!’ repeated the man. ‘Yes; I’ll help you, you young rascal!

What books are these? You’ve been a stealing ’em, have you? Give ’em here.’ With these words, the man tore the volumes from his grasp, and struck him on the head.

‘That’s right!’ cried a looker-on, from a garret-window. ‘That’s the only way of bringing him to his senses!’

‘To be sure!’ cried a sleepy-faced carpenter, casting an approving look at the garret-window.

‘It’ll do him good!’ said the two women.

‘And he shall have it, too!’ rejoined the man, administering another blow, and seizing Oliver by the collar. ‘Come on, you young villain! Here, Bull’s-eye, mind him, boy! Mind him!’

Weak with recent illness; stupified by the blows and the suddenness of the attack; terrified by the fierce growling of the dog, and the brutality of the man; overpowered by the conviction of the bystanders that he really was the hardened little wretch he was described to be; what could one poor child do! Darkness had set in; it was a low neighborhood; no help was near; resistance was useless. In another moment he was dragged into a labyrinth of dark narrow courts, and was forced along them at a pace which rendered the few cries he dared to give utterance to, unintelligible. It was of little moment, indeed, whether they were intelligible or no; for there was nobody to care for them, had they been ever so plain.

The gas-lamps were lighted; Mrs. Bedwin was waiting anxiously at the open door; the servant had run up the street twenty times to see if there were any traces of Oliver; and still the two old gentlemen sat, perseveringly, in the dark parlour, with the watch between them.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NARROW STREETS AND courts, at length, terminated in a large open space; scattered about which, were pens for beasts, and other indications of a cattle-market. Sikes slackened his pace when they reached this spot: the girl being quite unable to support any longer, the rapid rate at which they had hitherto walked. Turning to Oliver, he roughly commanded him to take hold of Nancy's hand.

'Do you hear?' growled Sikes, as Oliver hesitated, and looked round.

They were in a dark corner, quite out of the track of passengers.

Oliver saw, but too plainly, that resistance would be of no avail. He held out his hand, which Nancy clasped tight in hers.

'Give me the other,' said Sikes, seizing Oliver's unoccupied hand. 'Here, Bull's-Eye!'

The dog looked up, and growled.

'See here, boy!' said Sikes, putting his other hand to Oliver's throat; 'if he speaks ever so soft a word, hold him! D'ye mind!'

The dog growled again; and licking his lips, eyed Oliver as if he were anxious to attach himself to his windpipe without delay.

'He's as willing as a Christian, strike me blind if he isn't!' said Sikes, regarding the animal with a kind of grim and ferocious approval. 'Now, you know what you've got to expect, master, so call away as quick as you like; the dog will soon stop that game. Get on, young'un!'

Bull's-eye wagged his tail in acknowledgment of this unusually endearing form of speech; and, giving vent to another admonitory growl for the benefit of Oliver, led the way onward.

It was Smithfield that they were crossing, although it might have been Grosvenor Square, for anything Oliver knew to the contrary. The night was dark and foggy. The lights in the shops could scarecely struggle through the

heavy mist, which thickened every moment and shrouded the streets and houses in gloom; rendering the strange place still stranger in Oliver's eyes; and making his uncertainty the more dismal and depressing.

They had hurried on a few paces, when a deep church-bell struck the hour. With its first stroke, his two conductors stopped, and turned their heads in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

'Eight o' clock, Bill,' said Nancy, when the bell ceased.

'What's the good of telling me that; I can hear it, can't I!' replied Sikes.

'I wonder whether THEY can hear it,' said Nancy.

'Of course they can,' replied Sikes. 'It was Bartlemy time when I was shopped; and there warn't a penny trumpet in the fair, as I couldn't hear the squeaking on. Arter I was locked up for the night, the row and din outside made the thundering old jail so silent, that I could almost have beat my brains out against the iron plates of the door.'

'Poor fellow!' said Nancy, who still had her face turned towards the quarter in which the bell had sounded. 'Oh, Bill, such fine young chaps as them!'

'Yes; that's all you women think of,' answered Sikes. 'Fine young chaps! Well, they're as good as dead, so it don't much matter.'

With this consolation, Mr. Sikes appeared to repress a rising tendency to jealousy, and, clasping Oliver's wrist more firmly, told him to step out again.

'Wait a minute!' said the girl: 'I wouldn't hurry by, if it was you that was coming out to be hung, the next time eight o'clock struck, Bill. I'd walk round and round the place till I dropped, if the snow was on the ground, and I hadn't a shawl to cover me.'

'And what good would that do?' inquired the unsentimental Mr. Sikes. 'Unless you could pitch over a file and twenty yards of good stout rope, you might as well be walking fifty mile off, or not walking at all, for all the good it would do me. Come on, and don't stand preaching there.'

The girl burst into a laugh; drew her shawl more closely round her; and they walked away. But Oliver felt her hand tremble, and, looking up in her face as they passed a gas-lamp, saw that it had turned a deadly white.

They walked on, by little-frequented and dirty ways, for a full half-hour: meeting very few people, and those appearing from their looks to hold much the same position in society as Mr. Sikes himself. At length they

turned into a very filthy narrow street, nearly full of old-clothes shops; the dog running forward, as if conscious that there was no further occasion for his keeping on guard, stopped before the door of a shop that was closed and apparently untenanted; the house was in a ruinous condition, and on the door was nailed a board, intimating that it was to let: which looked as if it had hung there for many years.

‘All right,’ cried Sikes, glancing cautiously about.

Nancy stooped below the shutters, and Oliver heard the sound of a bell. They crossed to the opposite side of the street, and stood for a few moments under a lamp. A noise, as if a sash window were gently raised, was heard; and soon afterwards the door softly opened. Mr. Sikes then seized the terrified boy by the collar with very little ceremony; and all three were quickly inside the house.

The passage was perfectly dark. They waited, while the person who had let them in, chained and barred the door.

‘Anybody here?’ inquired Sikes.

‘No,’ replied a voice, which Oliver thought he had heard before.

‘Is the old ’un here?’ asked the robber.

‘Yes,’ replied the voice, ‘and precious down in the mouth he has been. Won’t he be glad to see you? Oh, no!’

The style of this reply, as well as the voice which delivered it, seemed familiar to Oliver’s ears: but it was impossible to distinguish even the form of the speaker in the darkness.

‘Let’s have a glim,’ said Sikes, ‘or we shall go breaking our necks, or treading on the dog. Look after your legs if you do!’

‘Stand still a moment, and I’ll get you one,’ replied the voice. The receding footsteps of the speaker were heard; and, in another minute, the form of Mr. John Dawkins, otherwise the Artful Dodger, appeared. He bore in his right hand a tallow candle stuck in the end of a cleft stick.

The young gentleman did not stop to bestow any other mark of recognition upon Oliver than a humourous grin; but, turning away, beckoned the visitors to follow him down a flight of stairs. They crossed an empty kitchen; and, opening the door of a low earthy-smelling room, which seemed to have been built in a small back-yard, were received with a shout of laughter.

‘Oh, my wig, my wig!’ cried Master Charles Bates, from whose lungs

the laughter had proceeded: ‘here he is! oh, cry, here he is! Oh, Fagin, look at him! Fagin, do look at him! I can’t bear it; it is such a jolly game, I can’t bear it. Hold me, somebody, while I laugh it out.’

With this irrepressible ebullition of mirth, Master Bates laid himself flat on the floor: and kicked convulsively for five minutes, in an ectasy of facetious joy. Then jumping to his feet, he snatched the cleft stick from the Dodger; and, advancing to Oliver, viewed him round and round; while the Jew, taking off his nightcap, made a great number of low bows to the bewildered boy. The Artful, meantime, who was of a rather saturnine disposition, and seldom gave way to merriment when it interfered with business, rifled Oliver’s pockets with steady assiduity.

‘Look at his togs, Fagin!’ said Charley, putting the light so close to his new jacket as nearly to set him on fire. ‘Look at his togs! Superfine cloth, and the heavy swell cut! Oh, my eye, what a game! And his books, too! Nothing but a gentleman, Fagin!’

‘Delighted to see you looking so well, my dear,’ said the Jew, bowing with mock humility. ‘The Artful shall give you another suit, my dear, for fear you should spoil that Sunday one. Why didn’t you write, my dear, and say you were coming? We’d have got something warm for supper.’

At his, Master Bates roared again: so loud, that Fagin himself relaxed, and even the Dodger smiled; but as the Artful drew forth the five-pound note at that instant, it is doubtful whether the sally of the discovery awakened his merriment.

‘Hallo, what’s that?’ inquired Sikes, stepping forward as the Jew seized the note. ‘That’s mine, Fagin.’

‘No, no, my dear,’ said the Jew. ‘Mine, Bill, mine. You shall have the books.’

‘If that ain’t mine!’ said Bill Sikes, putting on his hat with a determined air; ‘mine and Nancy’s that is; I’ll take the boy back again.’

The Jew started. Oliver started too, though from a very different cause; for he hoped that the dispute might really end in his being taken back.

‘Come! Hand over, will you?’ said Sikes.

‘This is hardly fair, Bill; hardly fair, is it, Nancy?’ inquired the Jew.

‘Fair, or not fair,’ retorted Sikes, ‘hand over, I tell you! Do you think Nancy and me has got nothing else to do with our precious time but to spend it in scouting arter, and kidnapping, every young boy as gets grabbed

through you? Give it here, you avaricious old skeleton, give it here!’

With this gentle remonstrance, Mr. Sikes plucked the note from between the Jew’s finger and thumb; and looking the old man coolly in the face, folded it up small, and tied it in his neckerchief.

‘That’s for our share of the trouble,’ said Sikes; ‘and not half enough, neither. You may keep the books, if you’re fond of reading. If you ain’t, sell ’em.’

‘They’re very pretty,’ said Charley Bates: who, with sundry grimaces, had been affecting to read one of the volumes in question; ‘beautiful writing, isn’t is, Oliver?’ At sight of the dismayed look with which Oliver regarded his tormentors, Master Bates, who was blessed with a lively sense of the ludicrous, fell into another ectasy, more boisterous than the first.

‘They belong to the old gentleman,’ said Oliver, wringing his hands; ‘to the good, kind, old gentleman who took me into his house, and had me nursed, when I was near dying of the fever. Oh, pray send them back; send him back the books and money. Keep me here all my life long; but pray, pray send them back. He’ll think I stole them; the old lady: all of them who were so kind to me: will think I stole them. Oh, do have mercy upon me, and send them back!’

With these words, which were uttered with all the energy of passionate grief, Oliver fell upon his knees at the Jew’s feet; and beat his hands together, in perfect desperation.

‘The boy’s right,’ remarked Fagin, looking covertly round, and knitting his shaggy eyebrows into a hard knot. ‘You’re right, Oliver, you’re right; they WILL think you have stolen ’em. Ha! ha!’ chuckled the Jew, rubbing his hands, ‘it couldn’t have happened better, if we had chosen our time!’

‘Of course it couldn’t,’ replied Sikes; ‘I know’d that, directly I see him coming through Clerkenwell, with the books under his arm. It’s all right enough. They’re soft-hearted psalm-singers, or they wouldn’t have taken him in at all; and they’ll ask no questions after him, fear they should be obliged to prosecute, and so get him lagged. He’s safe enough.’

Oliver had looked from one to the other, while these words were being spoken, as if he were bewildered, and could scarecely understand what passed; but when Bill Sikes concluded, he jumped suddenly to his feet, and tore wildly from the room: uttering shrieks for help, which made the bare old house echo to the roof.

‘Keep back the dog, Bill!’ cried Nancy, springing before the door, and closing it, as the Jew and his two pupils darted out in pursuit. ‘Keep back the dog; he’ll tear the boy to pieces.’

‘Serve him right!’ cried Sikes, struggling to disengage himself from the girl’s grasp. ‘Stand off from me, or I’ll split your head against the wall.’

‘I don’t care for that, Bill, I don’t care for that,’ screamed the girl, struggling violently with the man, ‘the child shan’t be torn down by the dog, unless you kill me first.’

‘Shan’t he!’ said Sikes, setting his teeth. ‘I’ll soon do that, if you don’t keep off.’

The housebreaker flung the girl from him to the further end of the room, just as the Jew and the two boys returned, dragging Oliver among them.

‘What’s the matter here!’ said Fagin, looking round.

‘The girl’s gone mad, I think,’ replied Sikes, savagely.

‘No, she hasn’t,’ said Nancy, pale and breathless from the scuffle; ‘no, she hasn’t, Fagin; don’t think it.’

‘Then keep quiet, will you?’ said the Jew, with a threatening look.

‘No, I won’t do that, neither,’ replied Nancy, speaking very loud. ‘Come! What do you think of that?’

Mr. Fagin was sufficiently well acquainted with the manners and customs of that particular species of humanity to which Nancy belonged, to feel tolerably certain that it would be rather unsafe to prolong any conversation with her, at present. With the view of diverting the attention of the company, he turned to Oliver.

‘So you wanted to get away, my dear, did you?’ said the Jew, taking up a jagged and knotted club which law in a corner of the fireplace; ‘eh?’

Oliver made no reply. But he watched the Jew’s motions, and breathed quickly.

‘Wanted to get assistance; called for the police; did you?’ sneered the Jew, catching the boy by the arm. ‘We’ll cure you of that, my young master.’

The Jew inflicted a smart blow on Oliver’s shoulders with the club; and was raising it for a second, when the girl, rushing forward, wrested it from his hand. She flung it into the fire, with a force that brought some of the glowing coals whirling out into the room.

‘I won’t stand by and see it done, Fagin,’ cried the girl. ‘You’ve got the

boy, and what more would you have?—Let him be—let him be—or I shall put that mark on some of you, that will bring me to the gallows before my time.'

The girl stamped her foot violently on the floor as she vented this threat; and with her lips compressed, and her hands clenched, looked alternately at the Jew and the other robber: her face quite colourless from the passion of rage into which she had gradually worked herself.

'Why, Nancy!' said the Jew, in a soothing tone; after a pause, during which he and Mr. Sikes had stared at one another in a disconcerted manner; 'you,—you're more clever than ever to-night. Ha! ha! my dear, you are acting beautifully.'

'Am I!' said the girl. 'Take care I don't overdo it. You will be the worse for it, Fagin, if I do; and so I tell you in good time to keep clear of me.'

There is something about a roused woman: especially if she add to all her other strong passions, the fierce impulses of recklessness and despair; which few men like to provoke. The Jew saw that it would be hopeless to affect any further mistake regarding the reality of Miss Nancy's rage; and, shrinking involuntarily back a few paces, cast a glance, half imploring and half cowardly, at Sikes: as if to hint that he was the fittest person to pursue the dialogue.

Mr. Sikes, thus mutely appealed to; and possibly feeling his personal pride and influence interested in the immediate reduction of Miss Nancy to reason; gave utterance to about a couple of score of curses and threats, the rapid production of which reflected great credit on the fertility of his invention. As they produced no visible effect on the object against whom they were discharged, however, he resorted to more tangible arguments.

'What do you mean by this?' said Sikes; backing the inquiry with a very common imprecation concerning the most beautiful of human features: which, if it were heard above, only once out of every fifty thousand times that it is uttered below, would render blindness as common a disorder as measles: 'what do you mean by it? Burn my body! Do you know who you are, and what you are?'

'Oh, yes, I know all about it,' replied the girl, laughing hysterically; and shaking her head from side to side, with a poor assumption of indifference.

'Well, then, keep quiet,' rejoined Sikes, with a growl like that he was accustomed to use when addressing his dog, 'or I'll quiet you for a good

long time to come.’

The girl laughed again: even less composedly than before; and, darting a hasty look at Sikes, turned her face aside, and bit her lip till the blood came.

‘You’re a nice one,’ added Sikes, as he surveyed her with a contemptuous air, ‘to take up the humane and gen—teel side! A pretty subject for the child, as you call him, to make a friend of!’

‘God Almighty help me, I am!’ cried the girl passionately; ‘and I wish I had been struck dead in the street, or had changed places with them we passed so near to-night, before I had lent a hand in bringing him here. He’s a thief, a liar, a devil, all that’s bad, from this night forth. Isn’t that enough for the old wretch, without blows?’

‘Come, come, Sikes,’ said the Jew appealing to him in a remonstratory tone, and motioning towards the boys, who were eagerly attentive to all that passed; ‘we must have civil words; civil words, Bill.’

‘Civil words!’ cried the girl, whose passion was frightful to see. ‘Civil words, you villain! Yes, you deserve ’em from me. I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this!’ pointing to Oliver. ‘I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since. Don’t you know it? Speak out! Don’t you know it?’

‘Well, well,’ replied the Jew, with an attempt at pacification; ‘and, if you have, it’s your living!’

‘Aye, it is!’ returned the girl; not speaking, but pouring out the words in one continuous and vehement scream. ‘It is my living; and the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home; and you’re the wretch that drove me to them long ago, and that’ll keep me there, day and night, day and night, till I die!’

‘I shall do you a mischief!’ interposed the Jew, goaded by these reproaches; ‘a mischief worse than that, if you say much more!’

The girl said nothing more; but, tearing her hair and dress in a transport of passion, made such a rush at the Jew as would probably have left signal marks of her revenge upon him, had not her wrists been seized by Sikes at the right moment; upon which, she made a few ineffectual struggles, and fainted.

‘She’s all right now,’ said Sikes, laying her down in a corner. ‘She’s uncommon strong in the arms, when she’s up in this way.’

The Jew wiped his forehead: and smiled, as if it were a relief to have the disturbance over; but neither he, nor Sikes, nor the dog, nor the boys,

seemed to consider it in any other light than a common occurance incidental to business.

‘It’s the worst of having to do with women,’ said the Jew, replacing his club; ‘but they’re clever, and we can’t get on, in our line, without ’em. Charley, show Oliver to bed.’

‘I suppose he’d better not wear his best clothes tomorrow, Fagin, had he?’ inquired Charley Bates.

‘Certainly not,’ replied the Jew, reciprocating the grin with which Charley put the question.

Master Bates, apparently much delighted with his commission, took the cleft stick: and led Oliver into an adjacent kitchen, where there were two or three of the beds on which he had slept before; and here, with many uncontrollable bursts of laughter, he produced the identical old suit of clothes which Oliver had so much congratulated himself upon leaving off at Mr. Brownlow’s; and the accidental display of which, to Fagin, by the Jew who purchased them, had been the very first clue received, of his whereabout.

‘Put off the smart ones,’ said Charley, ‘and I’ll give ’em to Fagin to take care of. What fun it is!’

Poor Oliver unwillingly complied. Master Bates rolling up the new clothes under his arm, departed from the room, leaving Oliver in the dark, and locking the door behind him.

The noise of Charley’s laughter, and the voice of Miss Betsy, who opportunely arrived to throw water over her friend, and perform other feminine offices for the promotion of her recovery, might have kept many people awake under more happy circumstances than those in which Oliver was placed. But he was sick and weary; and he soon fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER XVII

IT IS THE CUSTOM on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon. The hero sinks upon his straw bed, weighed down by fetters and misfortunes; in the next scene, his faithful but unconscious squire regales the audience with a comic song. We behold, with throbbing bosoms, the heroine in the grasp of a proud and ruthless baron: her virtue and her life alike in danger, drawing forth her dagger to preserve the one at the cost of the other; and just as our expectations are wrought up to the highest pitch, a whistle is heard, and we are straightway transported to the great hall of the castle; where a grey-headed seneschal sings a funny chorus with a funnier body of vassals, who are free of all sorts of places, from church vaults to palaces, and roam about in company, carolling perpetually.

Such changes appear absurd; but they are not so unnatural as they would seem at first sight. The transitions in real life from well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning-weeds to holiday garments, are not a whit less startling; only, there, we are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on, which makes a vast difference. The actors in the mimic life of the theatre, are blind to violent transitions and abrupt impulses of passion or feeling, which, presented before the eyes of mere spectators, are at once condemned as outrageous and preposterous.

As sudden shiftings of the scene, and rapid changes of time and place, are not only sanctioned in books by long usage, but are by many considered as the great art of authorship: an author’s skill in his craft being, by such critics, chiefly estimated with relation to the dilemmas in which he leaves his characters at the end of every chapter: this brief introduction to the present one may perhaps be deemed unnecessary. If so, let it be considered

a delicate intimation on the part of the historian that he is going back to the town in which Oliver Twist was born; the reader taking it for granted that there are good and substantial reasons for making the journey, or he would not be invited to proceed upon such an expedition.

Mr. Bumble emerged at early morning from the workhouse-gate, and walked with portly carriage and commanding steps, up the High Street. He was in the full bloom and pride of beadlehood; his cocked hat and coat were dazzling in the morning sun; he clutched his cane with the vigorous tenacity of health and power. Mr. Bumble always carried his head high; but this morning it was higher than usual. There was an abstraction in his eye, an elevation in his air, which might have warned an observant stranger that thoughts were passing in the beadle's mind, too great for utterance.

Mr. Bumble stopped not to converse with the small shopkeepers and others who spoke to him, deferentially, as he passed along. He merely returned their salutations with a wave of his hand, and relaxed not in his dignified pace, until he reached the farm where Mrs. Mann tended the infant paupers with parochial care.

'Drat that beadle!' said Mrs. Mann, hearing the well-known shaking at the garden-gate. 'If it isn't him at this time in the morning! Lauk, Mr. Bumble, only think of its being you! Well, dear me, it IS a pleasure, this is! Come into the parlour, sir, please.'

The first sentence was addressed to Susan; and the exclamations of delight were uttered to Mr. Bumble: as the good lady unlocked the garden-gate: and showed him, with great attention and respect, into the house.

'Mrs. Mann,' said Mr. Bumble; not sitting upon, or dropping himself into a seat, as any common jackanapes would: but letting himself gradually and slowly down into a chair; 'Mrs. Mann, ma'am, good morning.'

'Well, and good morning to *you*, sir,' replied Mrs. Mann, with many smiles; 'and hoping you find yourself well, sir!'

'So-so, Mrs. Mann,' replied the beadle. 'A porochial life is not a bed of roses, Mrs. Mann.'

'Ah, that it isn't indeed, Mr. Bumble,' rejoined the lady. And all the infant paupers might have chorussed the rejoinder with great propriety, if they had heard it.

'A porochial life, ma'am,' continued Mr. Bumble, striking the table with his cane, 'is a life of worrit, and vexation, and hardihood; but all public

characters, as I may say, must suffer prosecution.’

Mrs. Mann, not very well knowing what the beadle meant, raised her hands with a look of sympathy, and sighed.

‘Ah! You may well sigh, Mrs. Mann!’ said the beadle.

Finding she had done right, Mrs. Mann sighed again: evidently to the satisfaction of the public character: who, repressing a complacent smile by looking sternly at his cocked hat, said,

‘Mrs. Mann, I am going to London.’

‘Lauk, Mr. Bumble!’ cried Mrs. Mann, starting back.

‘To London, ma’am,’ resumed the inflexible beadle, ‘by coach. I and two paupers, Mrs. Mann! A legal action is a coming on, about a settlement; and the board has appointed me—me, Mrs. Mann—to dispose to the matter before the quarter-sessions at Clerkinwell.

And I very much question,’ added Mr. Bumble, drawing himself up, ‘whether the Clerkinwell Sessions will not find themselves in the wrong box before they have done with me.’

‘Oh! you mustn’t be too hard upon them, sir,’ said Mrs. Mann, coaxingly.

‘The Clerkinwell Sessions have brought it upon themselves, ma’am,’ replied Mr. Bumble; ‘and if the Clerkinwell Sessions find that they come off rather worse than they expected, the Clerkinwell Sessions have only themselves to thank.’

There was so much determination and depth of purpose about the menacing manner in which Mr. Bumble delivered himself of these words, that Mrs. Mann appeared quite awed by them. At length she said,

‘You’re going by coach, sir? I thought it was always usual to send them paupers in carts.’

‘That’s when they’re ill, Mrs. Mann,’ said the beadle. ‘We put the sick paupers into open carts in the rainy weather, to prevent their taking cold.’

‘Oh!’ said Mrs. Mann.

‘The opposition coach contracts for these two; and takes them cheap,’ said Mr. Bumble. ‘They are both in a very low state, and we find it would come two pound cheaper to move ’em than to bury ’em—that is, if we can throw ’em upon another parish, which I think we shall be able to do, if they don’t die upon the road to spite us. Ha! ha! ha!’

When Mr. Bumble had laughed a little while, his eyes again encountered

the cocked hat; and he became grave.

‘We are forgetting business, ma’am,’ said the beadle; ‘here is your porochial stipend for the month.’

Mr. Bumble produced some silver money rolled up in paper, from his pocket-book; and requested a receipt: which Mrs. Mann wrote.

‘It’s very much blotted, sir,’ said the farmer of infants; ‘but it’s formal enough, I dare say. Thank you, Mr. Bumble, sir, I am very much obliged to you, I’m sure.’

Mr. Bumble nodded, blandly, in acknowledgment of Mrs. Mann’s curtsey; and inquired how the children were.

‘Bless their dear little hearts!’ said Mrs. Mann with emotion, ‘they’re as well as can be, the dears! Of course, except the two that died last week. And little Dick.’

‘Isn’t that boy no better?’ inquired Mr. Bumble.

Mrs. Mann shook her head.

‘He’s a ill-conditioned, wicious, bad-disposed porochial child that,’ said Mr. Bumble angrily. ‘Where is he?’

‘I’ll bring him to you in one minute, sir,’ replied Mrs. Mann. ‘Here, you Dick!’

After some calling, Dick was discovered. Having had his face put under the pump, and dried upon Mrs. Mann’s gown, he was led into the awful presence of Mr. Bumble, the beadle.

The child was pale and thin; his cheeks were sunken; and his eyes large and bright. The scanty parish dress, the livery of his misery, hung loosely on his feeble body; and his young limbs had wasted away, like those of an old man.

Such was the little being who stood trembling beneath Mr. Bumble’s glance; not daring to lift his eyes from the floor; and dreading even to hear the beadle’s voice.

‘Can’t you look at the gentleman, you obstinate boy?’ said Mrs. Mann.

The child meekly raised his eyes, and encountered those of Mr. Bumble.

‘What’s the matter with you, porochial Dick?’ inquired Mr. Bumble, with well-timed jocularity.

‘Nothing, sir,’ replied the child faintly.

‘I should think not,’ said Mrs. Mann, who had of course laughed very much at Mr. Bumble’s humour.

‘You want for nothing, I’m sure.’

‘I should like—’ faltered the child.

‘Hey-day!’ interposed Mr. Mann, ‘I suppose you’re going to say that you DO want for something, now? Why, you little wretch—’

‘Stop, Mrs. Mann, stop!’ said the beadle, raising his hand with a show of authority. ‘Like what, sir, eh?’

‘I should like,’ faltered the child, ‘if somebody that can write, would put a few words down for me on a piece of paper, and fold it up and seal it, and keep it for me, after I am laid in the ground.’

‘Why, what does the boy mean?’ exclaimed Mr. Bumble, on whom the earnest manner and wan aspect of the child had made some impression: accustomed as he was to such things. ‘What do you mean, sir?’

‘I should like,’ said the child, ‘to leave my dear love to poor Oliver Twist; and to let him know how often I have sat by myself and cried to think of his wandering about in the dark nights with nobody to help him. And I should like to tell him,’ said the child pressing his small hands together, and speaking with great fervour, ‘that I was glad to die when I was very young; for, perhaps, if I had lived to be a man, and had grown old, my little sister who is in Heaven, might forget me, or be unlike me; and it would be so much happier if we were both children there together.’

Mr. Bumble surveyed the little speaker, from head to foot, with indescribable astonishment; and, turning to his companion, said, ‘They’re all in one story, Mrs. Mann. That out-dacious Oliver had demogalized them all!’

‘I couldn’t have believed it, sir,’ said Mrs. Mann, holding up her hands, and looking malignantly at Dick. ‘I never see such a hardened little wretch!’

‘Take him away, ma’am!’ said Mr. Bumble imperiously. ‘This must be stated to the board, Mrs. Mann.

‘I hope the gentleman will understand that it isn’t my fault, sir?’ said Mrs. Mann, whimpering pathetically.

‘They shall understand that, ma’am; they shall be acquainted with the true state of the case,’ said Mr. Bumble. ‘There; take him away, I can’t bear the sight on him.’

Dick was immediately taken away, and locked up in the coal-cellar. Mr. Bumble shortly afterwards took himself off, to prepare for his journey.

At six o’clock next morning, Mr. Bumble: having exchanged his cocked

hat for a round one, and encased his person in a blue great-coat with a cape to it: took his place on the outside of the coach, accompanied by the criminals whose settlement was disputed; with whom, in due course of time, he arrived in London.

He experienced no other crosses on the way, than those which originated in the perverse behaviour of the two paupers, who persisted in shivering, and complaining of the cold, in a manner which, Mr. Bumble declared, caused his teeth to chatter in his head, and made him feel quite uncomfortable; although he had a great-coat on.

Having disposed of these evil-minded persons for the night, Mr. Bumble sat himself down in the house at which the coach stopped; and took a temperate dinner of steaks, oyster sauce, and porter. Putting a glass of hot gin-and-water on the chimney-piece, he drew his chair to the fire; and, with sundry moral reflections on the too-prevalent sin of discontent and complaining, composed himself to read the paper.

The very first paragraph upon which Mr. Bumble's eye rested, was the following advertisement.

'FIVE GUINEAS REWARD

> 'Whereas a young boy, named Oliver Twist, absconded, or was enticed, on Thursday evening last, from his home, at Pentonville; and has not since been heard of. The above reward will be paid to any person who will give such information as will lead to the discovery of the said Oliver Twist, or tend to throw any light upon his previous history, in which the advertiser is, for many reasons, warmly interested.'

And then followed a full description of Oliver's dress, person, appearance, and disappearance: with the name and address of Mr. Brownlow at full length.

Mr. Bumble opened his eyes; read the advertisement, slowly and carefully, three several times; and in something more than five minutes was on his way to Pentonville: having actually, in his excitement, left the glass of hot gin-and-water, untasted.

'Is Mr. Brownlow at home?' inquired Mr. Bumble of the girl who

opened the door.

To this inquiry the girl returned the not uncommon, but rather evasive reply of ‘I don’t know; where do you come from?’

Mr. Bumble no sooner uttered Oliver’s name, in explanation of his errand, than Mrs. Bedwin, who had been listening at the parlour door, hastened into the passage in a breathless state.

‘Come in, come in,’ said the old lady: ‘I knew we should hear of him. Poor dear! I knew we should! I was certain of it. Bless his heart! I said so all along.’

Having heard this, the worthy old lady hurried back into the parlour again; and seating herself on a sofa, burst into tears. The girl, who was not quite so susceptible, had run upstairs meanwhile; and now returned with a request that Mr. Bumble would follow her immediately: which he did.

He was shown into the little back study, where sat Mr. Brownlow and his friend Mr. Grimwig, with decanters and glasses before them. The latter gentleman at once burst into the exclamation:

‘A beadle. A parish beadle, or I’ll eat my head.’

‘Pray don’t interrupt just now,’ said Mr. Brownlow. ‘Take a seat, will you?’

Mr. Bumble sat himself down; quite confounded by the oddity of Mr. Grimwig’s manner. Mr. Brownlow moved the lamp, so as to obtain an uninterrupted view of the beadle’s countenance; and said, with a little impatience,

‘Now, sir, you come in consequence of having seen the advertisement?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Mr. Bumble.

‘And you ARE a beadle, are you not?’ inquired Mr. Grimwig.

‘I am a porochial beadle, gentlemen,’ rejoined Mr. Bumble proudly.

‘Of course,’ observed Mr. Grimwig aside to his friend, ‘I knew he was. A beadle all over!’

Mr. Brownlow gently shook his head to impose silence on his friend, and resumed:

‘Do you know where this poor boy is now?’

‘No more than nobody,’ replied Mr. Bumble.

‘Well, what DO you know of him?’ inquired the old gentleman. ‘Speak out, my friend, if you have anything to say. What DO you know of him?’

‘You don’t happen to know any good of him, do you?’ said Mr.

Grimwig, caustically; after an attentive perusal of Mr. Bumble's features.

Mr. Bumble, catching at the inquiry very quickly, shook his head with portentous solemnity.

'You see?' said Mr. Grimwig, looking triumphantly at Mr. Brownlow.

Mr. Brownlow looked apprehensively at Mr. Bumble's pursed-up countenance; and requested him to communicate what he knew regarding Oliver, in as few words as possible.

Mr. Bumble put down his hat; unbuttoned his coat; folded his arms; inclined his head in a retrospective manner; and, after a few moments' reflection, commenced his story.

It would be tedious if given in the beadle's words: occupying, as it did, some twenty minutes in the telling; but the sum and substance of it was, that Oliver was a foundling, born of low and vicious parents. That he had, from his birth, displayed no better qualities than treachery, ingratitude, and malice. That he had terminated his brief career in the place of his birth, by making a sanguinary and cowardly attack on an unoffending lad, and running away in the night-time from his master's house. In proof of his really being the person he represented himself, Mr. Bumble laid upon the table the papers he had brought to town. Folding his arms again, he then awaited Mr. Brownlow's observations.

'I fear it is all too true,' said the old gentleman sorrowfully, after looking over the papers. 'This is not much for your intelligence; but I would gladly have given you treble the money, if it had been favourable to the boy.'

It is not improbable that if Mr. Bumble had been possessed of this information at an earlier period of the interview, he might have imparted a very different colouring to his little history. It was too late to do it now, however; so he shook his head gravely, and, pocketing the five guineas, withdrew.

Mr. Brownlow paced the room to and fro for some minutes; evidently so much disturbed by the beadle's tale, that even Mr. Grimwig forbore to vex him further.

At length he stopped, and rang the bell violently.

'Mrs. Bedwin,' said Mr. Brownlow, when the housekeeper appeared; 'that boy, Oliver, is an imposter.'

'It can't be, sir. It cannot be,' said the old lady energetically.

'I tell you he is,' retorted the old gentleman. 'What do you mean by can't

be? We have just heard a full account of him from his birth; and he has been a thorough-paced little villain, all his life.'

'I never will believe it, sir,' replied the old lady, firmly. 'Never!'

'You old women never believe anything but quack-doctors, and lying story-books,' growled Mr. Grimwig. 'I knew it all along. Why didn't you take my advise in the beginning; you would if he hadn't had a fever, I suppose, eh? He was interesting, wasn't he? Interesting! Bah!' And Mr. Grimwig poked the fire with a flourish.

'He was a dear, grateful, gentle child, sir,' retorted Mrs. Bedwin, indignantly. 'I know what children are, sir; and have done these forty years; and people who can't say the same, shouldn't say anything about them. That's my opinion!'

This was a hard hit at Mr. Grimwig, who was a bachelor. As it extorted nothing from that gentleman but a smile, the old lady tossed her head, and smoothed down her apron preparatory to another speech, when she was stopped by Mr. Brownlow.

'Silence!' said the old gentleman, feigning an anger he was far from feeling. 'Never let me hear the boy's name again. I rang to tell you that. Never. Never, on any pretence, mind! You may leave the room, Mrs. Bedwin. Remember! I am in earnest.'

There were sad hearts at Mr. Brownlow's that night.

Oliver's heart sank within him, when he thought of his good friends; it was well for him that he could not know what they had heard, or it might have broken outright.

CHAPTER XVIII

ABOUT NOON NEXT DAY, when the Dodger and Master Bates had gone out to pursue their customary avocations, Mr. Fagin took the opportunity of reading Oliver a long lecture on the crying sin of ingratitude; of which he clearly demonstrated he had been guilty, to no ordinary extent, in wilfully absenting himself from the society of his anxious friends; and, still more, in endeavouring to escape from them after so much trouble and expense had been incurred in his recovery. Mr. Fagin laid great stress on the fact of his having taken Oliver in, and cherished him, when, without his timely aid, he might have perished with hunger; and he related the dismal and affecting history of a young lad whom, in his philanthropy, he had succoured under parallel circumstances, but who, proving unworthy of his confidence and evincing a desire to communicate with the police, had unfortunately come to be hanged at the Old Bailey one morning. Mr. Fagin did not seek to conceal his share in the catastrophe, but lamented with tears in his eyes that the wrong-headed and treacherous behaviour of the young person in question, had rendered it necessary that he should become the victim of certain evidence for the crown: which, if it were not precisely true, was indispensably necessary for the safety of him (Mr. Fagin) and a few select friends. Mr. Fagin concluded by drawing a rather disagreeable picture of the discomforts of hanging; and, with great friendliness and politeness of manner, expressed his anxious hopes that he might never be obliged to submit Oliver Twist to that unpleasant operation.

Little Oliver’s blood ran cold, as he listened to the Jew’s words, and imperfectly comprehended the dark threats conveyed in them. That it was possible even for justice itself to confound the innocent with the guilty when they were in accidental companionship, he knew already; and that deeply-laid plans for the destruction of inconveniently knowing or over-

communicative persons, had been really devised and carried out by the Jew on more occasions than one, he thought by no means unlikely, when he recollected the general nature of the altercations between that gentleman and Mr. Sikes: which seemed to bear reference to some foregone conspiracy of the kind. As he glanced timidly up, and met the Jew's searching look, he felt that his pale face and trembling limbs were neither unnoticed nor unrelished by that wary old gentleman.

The Jew, smiling hideously, patted Oliver on the head, and said, that if he kept himself quiet, and applied himself to business, he saw they would be very good friends yet. Then, taking his hat, and covering himself with an old patched great-coat, he went out, and locked the room-door behind him.

And so Oliver remained all that day, and for the greater part of many subsequent days, seeing nobody, between early morning and midnight, and left during the long hours to commune with his own thoughts. Which, never failing to revert to his kind friends, and the opinion they must long ago have formed of him, were sad indeed.

After the lapse of a week or so, the Jew left the room-door unlocked; and he was at liberty to wander about the house.

It was a very dirty place. The rooms upstairs had great high wooden chimney-pieces and large doors, with panelled walls and cornices to the ceiling; which, although they were black with neglect and dust, were ornamented in various ways. From all of these tokens Oliver concluded that a long time ago, before the old Jew was born, it had belonged to better people, and had perhaps been quite gay and handsome: dismal and dreary as it looked now.

Spiders had built their webs in the angles of the walls and ceilings; and sometimes, when Oliver walked softly into a room, the mice would scamper across the floor, and run back terrified to their holes. With these exceptions, there was neither sight nor sound of any living thing; and often, when it grew dark, and he was tired of wandering from room to room, he would crouch in the corner of the passage by the street-door, to be as near living people as he could; and would remain there, listening and counting the hours, until the Jew or the boys returned.

In all the rooms, the mouldering shutters were fast closed: the bars which held them were screwed tight into the wood; the only light which was admitted, stealing its way through round holes at the top: which made the

rooms more gloomy, and filled them with strange shadows. There was a back-garret window with rusty bars outside, which had no shutter; and out of this, Oliver often gazed with a melancholy face for hours together; but nothing was to be descried from it but a confused and crowded mass of housetops, blackened chimneys, and gable-ends. Sometimes, indeed, a grizzly head might be seen, peering over the parapet-wall of a distant house; but it was quickly withdrawn again; and as the window of Oliver's observatory was nailed down, and dimmed with the rain and smoke of years, it was as much as he could do to make out the forms of the different objects beyond, without making any attempt to be seen or heard,—which he had as much chance of being, as if he had lived inside the ball of St. Paul's Cathedral.

One afternoon, the Dodger and Master Bates being engaged out that evening, the first-named young gentleman took it into his head to evince some anxiety regarding the decoration of his person (to do him justice, this was by no means an habitual weakness with him); and, with this end and aim, he condescendingly commanded Oliver to assist him in his toilet, straightway.

Oliver was but too glad to make himself useful; too happy to have some faces, however bad, to look upon; too desirous to conciliate those about him when he could honestly do so; to throw any objection in the way of this proposal. So he at once expressed his readiness; and, kneeling on the floor, while the Dodger sat upon the table so that he could take his foot in his laps, he applied himself to a process which Mr. Dawkins designated as 'japanning his trotter-cases.' The phrase, rendered into plain English, signifieth, cleaning his boots.

Whether it was the sense of freedom and independence which a rational animal may be supposed to feel when he sits on a table in an easy attitude smoking a pipe, swinging one leg carelessly to and fro, and having his boots cleaned all the time, without even the past trouble of having taken them off, or the prospective misery of putting them on, to disturb his reflections; or whether it was the goodness of the tobacco that soothed the feelings of the Dodger, or the mildness of the beer that mollified his thoughts; he was evidently tinctured, for the nonce, with a spice of romance and enthusiasm, foreign to his general nature. He looked down on Oliver, with a thoughtful countenance, for a brief space; and then, raising his head, and heaving a

gentle sign, said, half in abstraction, and half to Master Bates:

‘What a pity it is he isn’t a prig!’

‘Ah!’ said Master Charles Bates; ‘he don’t know what’s good for him.’

The Dodger sighed again, and resumed his pipe: as did Charley Bates. They both smoked, for some seconds, in silence.

‘I suppose you don’t even know what a prig is?’ said the Dodger mournfully.

‘I think I know that,’ replied Oliver, looking up. ‘It’s a the—; you’re one, are you not?’ inquired Oliver, checking himself.

‘I am,’ replied the Dodger. ‘I’d scorn to be anything else.’ Mr. Dawkins gave his hat a ferocious cock, after delivering this sentiment, and looked at Master Bates, as if to denote that he would feel obliged by his saying anything to the contrary.

‘I am,’ repeated the Dodger. ‘So’s Charley. So’s Fagin. So’s Sikes. So’s Nancy. So’s Bet. So we all are, down to the dog. And he’s the downiest one of the lot!’

‘And the least given to peaching,’ added Charley Bates.

‘He wouldn’t so much as bark in a witness-box, for fear of committing himself; no, not if you tied him up in one, and left him there without wittles for a fortnight,’ said the Dodger.

‘Not a bit of it,’ observed Charley.

‘He’s a rum dog. Don’t he look fierce at any strange cove that laughs or sings when he’s in company!’ pursued the Dodger. ‘Won’t he growl at all, when he hears a fiddle playing! And don’t he hate other dogs as ain’t of his breed! Oh, no!’

‘He’s an out-and-out Christian,’ said Charley.

This was merely intended as a tribute to the animal’s abilities, but it was an appropriate remark in another sense, if Master Bates had only known it; for there are a good many ladies and gentlemen, claiming to be out-and-out Christians, between whom, and Mr. Sikes’ dog, there exist strong and singular points of resemblance.

‘Well, well,’ said the Dodger, recurring to the point from which they had strayed: with that mindfulness of his profession which influenced all his proceedings. ‘This hasn’t go anything to do with young Green here.’

‘No more it has,’ said Charley. ‘Why don’t you put yourself under Fagin, Oliver?’

‘And make your fortun’ out of hand?’ added the Dodger, with a grin.

‘And so be able to retire on your property, and do the gen-teel: as I mean to, in the very next leap-year but four that ever comes, and the forty-second Tuesday in Trinity-week,’ said Charley Bates.

‘I don’t like it,’ rejoined Oliver, timidly; ‘I wish they would let me go. I —I—would rather go.’

‘And Fagin would RATHER not!’ rejoined Charley.

Oliver knew this too well; but thinking it might be dangerous to express his feelings more openly, he only sighed, and went on with his boot-cleaning.

‘Go!’ exclaimed the Dodger. ‘Why, where’s your spirit?’ Don’t you take any pride out of yourself? Would you go and be dependent on your friends?’

‘Oh, blow that!’ said Master Bates: drawing two or three silk handkerchiefs from his pocket, and tossing them into a cupboard, ‘that’s too mean; that is.’

‘*I* couldn’t do it,’ said the Dodger, with an air of haughty disgust.

‘You can leave your friends, though,’ said Oliver with a half smile; ‘and let them be punished for what you did.’

‘That,’ rejoined the Dodger, with a wave of his pipe, ‘That was all out of consideration for Fagin, ’cause the traps know that we work together, and he might have got into trouble if we hadn’t made our lucky; that was the move, wasn’t it, Charley?’

Master Bates nodded assent, and would have spoken, but the recollection of Oliver’s flight came so suddenly upon him, that the smoke he was inhaling got entangled with a laugh, and went up into his head, and down into his throat: and brought on a fit of coughing and stamping, about five minutes long.

‘Look here!’ said the Dodger, drawing forth a handful of shillings and halfpence. ‘Here’s a jolly life! What’s the odds where it comes from? Here, catch hold; there’s plenty more where they were took from. You won’t, won’t you? Oh, you precious flat!’

‘It’s naughty, ain’t it, Oliver?’ inquired Charley Bates. ‘He’ll come to be scragged, won’t he?’

‘I don’t know what that means,’ replied Oliver.

‘Something in this way, old feller,’ said Charly. As he said it, Master

Bates caught up an end of his neckerchief; and, holding it erect in the air, dropped his head on his shoulder, and jerked a curious sound through his teeth; thereby indicating, by a lively pantomimic representation, that scragging and hanging were one and the same thing.

‘That’s what it means,’ said Charley. ‘Look how he stares, Jack!

I never did see such prime company as that ’ere boy; he’ll be the death of me, I know he will.’ Master Charley Bates, having laughed heartily again, resumed his pipe with tears in his eyes.

‘You’ve been brought up bad,’ said the Dodger, surveying his boots with much satisfaction when Oliver had polished them. ‘Fagin will make something of you, though, or you’ll be the first he ever had that turned out unprofitable. You’d better begin at once; for you’ll come to the trade long before you think of it; and you’re only losing time, Oliver.’

Master Bates backed this advice with sundry moral admonitions of his own: which, being exhausted, he and his friend Mr. Dawkins launched into a glowing description of the numerous pleasures incidental to the life they led, interspersed with a variety of hints to Oliver that the best thing he could do, would be to secure Fagin’s favour without more delay, by the means which they themselves had employed to gain it.

‘And always put this in your pipe, Nolly,’ said the Dodger, as the Jew was heard unlocking the door above, ‘if you don’t take fogels and tickers —’

‘What’s the good of talking in that way?’ interposed Master Bates; ‘he don’t know what you mean.’

‘If you don’t take pocket-handkechers and watches,’ said the Dodger, reducing his conversation to the level of Oliver’s capacity, ‘some other cove will; so that the coves that lose ’em will be all the worse, and you’ll be all the worse, too, and nobody half a ha’p’orth the better, except the chaps wot gets them—and you’ve just as good a right to them as they have.’

‘To be sure, to be sure!’ said the Jew, who had entered unseen by Oliver. ‘It all lies in a nutshell my dear; in a nutshell, take the Dodger’s word for it. Ha! ha! ha! He understands the catechism of his trade.’

The old man rubbed his hands gleefully together, as he corroborated the Dodger’s reasoning in these terms; and chuckled with delight at his pupil’s proficiency.

The conversation proceeded no farther at this time, for the Jew had

returned home accompanied by Miss Betsy, and a gentleman whom Oliver had never seen before, but who was accosted by the Dodger as Tom Chitling; and who, having lingered on the stairs to exchange a few gallantries with the lady, now made his appearance.

Mr. Chitling was older in years than the Dodger: having perhaps numbered eighteen winters; but there was a degree of deference in his deportment towards that young gentleman which seemed to indicate that he felt himself conscious of a slight inferiority in point of genius and professional aquirements. He had small twinkling eyes, and a pock-marked face; wore a fur cap, a dark corduroy jacket, greasy fustian trousers, and an apron. His wardrobe was, in truth, rather out of repair; but he excused himself to the company by stating that his ‘time’ was only out an hour before; and that, in consequence of having worn the regimentals for six weeks past, he had not been able to bestow any attention on his private clothes. Mr. Chitling added, with strong marks of irritation, that the new way of fumigating clothes up yonder was infernal unconstitutional, for it burnt holes in them, and there was no remedy against the County. The same remark he considered to apply to the regulation mode of cutting the hair: which he held to be decidedly unlawful. Mr. Chitling wound up his observations by stating that he had not touched a drop of anything for forty-two moral long hard-working days; and that he ‘wished he might be busted if he warn’t as dry as a lime-basket.’

‘Where do you think the gentleman has come from, Oliver?’ inquired the Jew, with a grin, as the other boys put a bottle of spirits on the table.

‘I—I—don’t know, sir,’ replied Oliver.

‘Who’s that?’ inquired Tom Chitling, casting a contemptuous look at Oliver.

‘A young friend of mine, my dear,’ replied the Jew.

‘He’s in luck, then,’ said the young man, with a meaning look at Fagin. ‘Never mind where I came from, young ’un; you’ll find your way there, soon enough, I’ll bet a crown!’

At this sally, the boys laughed. After some more jokes on the same subject, they exchanged a few short whispers with Fagin; and withdrew.

After some words apart between the last comer and Fagin, they drew their chairs towards the fire; and the Jew, telling Oliver to come and sit by him, led the conversation to the topics most calculated to interest his

hearers. These were, the great advantages of the trade, the proficiency of the Dodger, the amiability of Charley Bates, and the liberality of the Jew himself. At length these subjects displayed signs of being thoroughly exhausted; and Mr. Chitling did the same: for the house of correction becomes fatiguing after a week or two. Miss Betsy accordingly withdrew; and left the party to their repose.

From this day, Oliver was seldom left alone; but was placed in almost constant communication with the two boys, who played the old game with the Jew every day: whether for their own improvement or Oliver's, Mr. Fagin best knew. At other times the old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in his younger days: mixed up with so much that was droll and curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that he was amused in spite of all his better feelings.

In short, the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils. Having prepared his mind, by solitude and gloom, to prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, he was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue for ever.

CHAPTER XIX

IT WAS A CHILL, DAMP, windy night, when the Jew: buttoning his great-coat tight round his shrivelled body, and pulling the collar up over his ears so as completely to obscure the lower part of his face: emerged from his den. He paused on the step as the door was locked and chained behind him; and having listened while the boys made all secure, and until their retreating footsteps were no longer audible, slunk down the street as quickly as he could.

The house to which Oliver had been conveyed, was in the neighborhood of Whitechapel. The Jew stopped for an instant at the corner of the street; and, glancing suspiciously round, crossed the road, and struck off in the direction of the Spitalfields.

The mud lay thick upon the stones, and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down, and everything felt cold and clammy to the touch. It seemed just the night when it befitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad. As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal.

He kept on his course, through many winding and narrow ways, until he reached Bethnal Green; then, turning suddenly off to the left, he soon became involved in a maze of the mean and dirty streets which abound in that close and densely-populated quarter.

The Jew was evidently too familiar with the ground he traversed to be at all bewildered, either by the darkness of the night, or the intricacies of the way. He hurried through several alleys and streets, and at length turned into one, lighted only by a single lamp at the farther end. At the door of a house in this street, he knocked; having exchanged a few muttered words with the

person who opened it, he walked upstairs.

A dog growled as he touched the handle of a room-door; and a man's voice demanded who was there.

'Only me, Bill; only me, my dear,' said the Jew looking in.

'Bring in your body then,' said Sikes. 'Lie down, you stupid brute! Don't you know the devil when he's got a great-coat on?'

Apparently, the dog had been somewhat deceived by Mr. Fagin's outer garment; for as the Jew unbuttoned it, and threw it over the back of a chair, he retired to the corner from which he had risen: wagging his tail as he went, to show that he was as well satisfied as it was in his nature to be.

'Well!' said Sikes.

'Well, my dear,' replied the Jew.—'Ah! Nancy.'

The latter recognition was uttered with just enough of embarrassment to imply a doubt of its reception; for Mr. Fagin and his young friend had not met, since she had interfered in behalf of Oliver. All doubts upon the subject, if he had any, were speedily removed by the young lady's behaviour. She took her feet off the fender, pushed back her chair, and bade Fagin draw up his, without saying more about it: for it was a cold night, and no mistake.

'It is cold, Nancy dear,' said the Jew, as he warmed his skinny hands over the fire. 'It seems to go right through one,' added the old man, touching his side.

'It must be a piercer, if it finds its way through your heart,' said Mr. Sikes. 'Give him something to drink, Nancy. Burn my body, make haste! It's enough to turn a man ill, to see his lean old carcase shivering in that way, like a ugly ghost just rose from the grave.'

Nancy quickly brought a bottle from a cupboard, in which there were many: which, to judge from the diversity of their appearance, were filled with several kinds of liquids. Sikes pouring out a glass of brandy, bade the Jew drink it off.

'Quite enough, quite, thankye, Bill,' replied the Jew, putting down the glass after just setting his lips to it.

'What! You're afraid of our getting the better of you, are you?' inquired Sikes, fixing his eyes on the Jew. 'Ugh!'

With a hoarse grunt of contempt, Mr. Sikes seized the glass, and threw the remainder of its contents into the ashes: as a preparatory ceremony to

filling it again for himself: which he did at once.

The Jew glanced round the room, as his companion tossed down the second glassful; not in curiousity, for he had seen it often before; but in a restless and suspicious manner habitual to him. It was a meanly furnished apartment, with nothing but the contents of the closet to induce the belief that its occupier was anything but a working man; and with no more suspicious articles displayed to view than two or three heavy bludgeons which stood in a corner, and a ‘life-preserver’ that hung over the chimney-piece.

‘There,’ said Sikes, smacking his lips. ‘Now I’m ready.’

‘For business?’ inquired the Jew.

‘For business,’ replied Sikes; ‘so say what you’ve got to say.’

‘About the crib at Chertsey, Bill?’ said the Jew, drawing his chair forward, and speaking in a very low voice.

‘Yes. Wot about it?’ inquired Sikes.

‘Ah! you know what I mean, my dear,’ said the Jew. ‘He knows what I mean, Nancy; don’t he?’

‘No, he don’t,’ sneered Mr. Sikes. ‘Or he won’t, and that’s the same thing. Speak out, and call things by their right names; don’t sit there, winking and blinking, and talking to me in hints, as if you warn’t the very first that thought about the robbery. Wot d’ye mean?’

‘Hush, Bill, hush!’ said the Jew, who had in vain attempted to stop this burst of indignation; ‘somebody will hear us, my dear. Somebody will hear us.’

‘Let ’em hear!’ said Sikes; ‘I don’t care.’ But as Mr. Sikes DID care, on reflection, he dropped his voice as he said the words, and grew calmer.

‘There, there,’ said the Jew, coaxingly. ‘It was only my caution, nothing more. Now, my dear, about that crib at Chertsey; when is it to be done, Bill, eh? When is it to be done? Such plate, my dear, such plate!’ said the Jew: rubbing his hands, and elevating his eyebrows in a rapture of anticipation.

‘Not at all,’ replied Sikes coldly.

‘Not to be done at all!’ echoed the Jew, leaning back in his chair.

‘No, not at all,’ rejoined Sikes. ‘At least it can’t be a put-up job, as we expected.’

‘Then it hasn’t been properly gone about,’ said the Jew, turning pale with anger. ‘Don’t tell me!’

‘But I will tell you,’ retorted Sikes. ‘Who are you that’s not to be told? I tell you that Toby Crackit has been hanging about the place for a fortnight, and he can’t get one of the servants in line.’

‘Do you mean to tell me, Bill,’ said the Jew: softening as the other grew heated: ‘that neither of the two men in the house can be got over?’

‘Yes, I do mean to tell you so,’ replied Sikes. ‘The old lady has had ’em these twenty years; and if you were to give ’em five hundred pound, they wouldn’t be in it.’

‘But do you mean to say, my dear,’ remonstrated the Jew, ‘that the women can’t be got over?’

‘Not a bit of it,’ replied Sikes.

‘Not by flash Toby Crackit?’ said the Jew incredulously. ‘Think what women are, Bill,’

‘No; not even by flash Toby Crackit,’ replied Sikes. ‘He says he’s worn sham whiskers, and a canary waistcoat, the whole blessed time he’s been loitering down there, and it’s all of no use.’

‘He should have tried mustachios and a pair of military trousers, my dear,’ said the Jew.

‘So he did,’ rejoined Sikes, ‘and they warn’t of no more use than the other plant.’

The Jew looked blank at this information. After ruminating for some minutes with his chin sunk on his breast, he raised his head and said, with a deep sigh, that if flash Toby Crackit reported aright, he feared the game was up.

‘And yet,’ said the old man, dropping his hands on his knees, ‘it’s a sad thing, my dear, to lose so much when we had set our hearts upon it.’

‘So it is,’ said Mr. Sikes. ‘Worse luck!’

A long silence ensued; during which the Jew was plunged in deep thought, with his face wrinkled into an expression of villainy perfectly demoniacal. Sikes eyed him furtively from time to time. Nancy, apparently fearful of irritating the housebreaker, sat with her eyes fixed upon the fire, as if she had been deaf to all that passed.

‘Fagin,’ said Sikes, abruptly breaking the stillness that prevailed; ‘is it worth fifty shiners extra, if it’s safely done from the outside?’

‘Yes,’ said the Jew, as suddenly rousing himself.

‘Is it a bargain?’ inquired Sikes.

‘Yes, my dear, yes,’ rejoined the Jew; his eyes glistening, and every muscle in his face working, with the excitement that the inquiry had awakened.

‘Then,’ said Sikes, thrusting aside the Jew’s hand, with some disdain, ‘let it come off as soon as you like. Toby and me were over the garden-wall the night afore last, sounding the panels of the door and shutters. The crib’s barred up at night like a jail; but there’s one part we can crack, safe and softly.’

‘Which is that, Bill?’ asked the Jew eagerly.

‘Why,’ whispered Sikes, ‘as you cross the lawn—’

‘Yes?’ said the Jew, bending his head forward, with his eyes almost starting out of it.

‘Umph!’ cried Sikes, stopping short, as the girl, scarcely moving her head, looked suddenly round, and pointed for an instant to the Jew’s face. ‘Never mind which part it is. You can’t do it without me, I know; but it’s best to be on the safe side when one deals with you.’

‘As you like, my dear, as you like,’ replied the Jew. ‘Is there no help wanted, but yours and Toby’s?’

‘None,’ said Sikes. ‘’Cept a centre-bit and a boy. The first we’ve both got; the second you must find us.’

‘A boy!’ exclaimed the Jew. ‘Oh! then it’s a panel, eh?’

‘Never mind wot it is!’ replied Sikes. ‘I want a boy, and he musn’t be a big ’un. Lord!’ said Mr. Sikes, reflectively, ‘if I’d only got that young boy of Ned, the chimbley-sweeper’s! He kept him small on purpose, and let him out by the job. But the father gets lagged; and then the Juvenile Delinquent Society comes, and takes the boy away from a trade where he was earning money, teaches him to read and write, and in time makes a ’prentice of him. And so they go on,’ said Mr. Sikes, his wrath rising with the recollection of his wrongs, ‘so they go on; and, if they’d got money enough (which it’s a Providence they haven’t,) we shouldn’t have half a dozen boys left in the whole trade, in a year or two.’

‘No more we should,’ acquiesced the Jew, who had been considering during this speech, and had only caught the last sentence. ‘Bill!’

‘What now?’ inquired Sikes.

The Jew nodded his head towards Nancy, who was still gazing at the fire; and intimated, by a sign, that he would have her told to leave the room.

Sikes shrugged his shoulders impatiently, as if he thought the precaution unnecessary; but complied, nevertheless, by requesting Miss Nancy to fetch him a jug of beer.

‘You don’t want any beer,’ said Nancy, folding her arms, and retaining her seat very composedly.

‘I tell you I do!’ replied Sikes.

‘Nonsense,’ rejoined the girl coolly, ‘Go on, Fagin. I know what he’s going to say, Bill; he needn’t mind me.’

The Jew still hesitated. Sikes looked from one to the other in some surprise.

‘Why, you don’t mind the old girl, do you, Fagin?’ he asked at length. ‘You’ve known her long enough to trust her, or the Devil’s in it. She ain’t one to blab. Are you Nancy?’

‘*I* should think not!’ replied the young lady: drawing her chair up to the table, and putting her elbows upon it.

‘No, no, my dear, I know you’re not,’ said the Jew; ‘but—’ and again the old man paused.

‘But wot?’ inquired Sikes.

‘I didn’t know whether she mightn’t p’r’aps be out of sorts, you know, my dear, as she was the other night,’ replied the Jew.

At this confession, Miss Nancy burst into a loud laugh; and, swallowing a glass of brandy, shook her head with an air of defiance, and burst into sundry exclamations of ‘Keep the game a-going!’ ‘Never say die!’ and the like. These seemed to have the effect of re-assuring both gentlemen; for the Jew nodded his head with a satisfied air, and resumed his seat: as did Mr. Sikes likewise.

‘Now, Fagin,’ said Nancy with a laugh. ‘Tell Bill at once, about Oliver!’

‘Ha! you’re a clever one, my dear: the sharpest girl I ever saw!’ said the Jew, patting her on the neck. ‘It WAS about Oliver I was going to speak, sure enough. Ha! ha! ha!’

‘What about him?’ demanded Sikes.

‘He’s the boy for you, my dear,’ replied the Jew in a hoarse whisper; laying his finger on the side of his nose, and grinning frightfully.

‘He!’ exclaimed. Sikes.

‘Have him, Bill!’ said Nancy. ‘I would, if I was in your place. He mayn’t be so much up, as any of the others; but that’s not what you want, if he’s

only to open a door for you. Depend upon it he's a safe one, Bill.'

'I know he is,' rejoined Fagin. 'He's been in good training these last few weeks, and it's time he began to work for his bread. Besides, the others are all too big.'

'Well, he is just the size I want,' said Mr. Sikes, ruminating.

'And will do everything you want, Bill, my dear,' interposed the Jew; 'he can't help himself. That is, if you frighten him enough.'

'Frighten him!' echoed Sikes. 'It'll be no sham frightening, mind you. If there's anything queer about him when we once get into the work; in for a penny, in for a pound. You won't see him alive again, Fagin. Think of that, before you send him. Mark my words!' said the robber, poising a crowbar, which he had drawn from under the bedstead.

'I've thought of it all,' said the Jew with energy. 'I've—I've had my eye upon him, my dears, close—close. Once let him feel that he is one of us; once fill his mind with the idea that he has been a thief; and he's ours! Ours for his life. Oho! It couldn't have come about better! The old man crossed his arms upon his breast; and, drawing his head and shoulders into a heap, literally hugged himself for joy.

'Ours!' said Sikes. 'Yours, you mean.'

'Perhaps I do, my dear,' said the Jew, with a shrill chuckle. 'Mine, if you like, Bill.'

'And wot,' said Sikes, scowling fiercely on his agreeable friend, 'wot makes you take so much pains about one chalk-faced kid, when you know there are fifty boys snoozing about Common Garden every night, as you might pick and choose from?'

'Because they're of no use to me, my dear,' replied the Jew, with some confusion, 'not worth the taking. Their looks convict 'em when they get into trouble, and I lose 'em all. With this boy, properly managed, my dears, I could do what I couldn't with twenty of them. Besides,' said the Jew, recovering his self-possession, 'he has us now if he could only give us leg-bail again; and he must be in the same boat with us. Never mind how he came there; it's quite enough for my power over him that he was in a robbery; that's all I want. Now, how much better this is, than being obliged to put the poor leetle boy out of the way—which would be dangerous, and we should lose by it besides.'

'When is it to be done?' asked Nancy, stopping some turbulent

exclamation on the part of Mr. Sikes, expressive of the disgust with which he received Fagin's affectation of humanity.

'Ah, to be sure,' said the Jew; 'when is it to be done, Bill?'

'I planned with Toby, the night arter to-morrow,' rejoined Sikes in a surly voice, 'if he heerd nothing from me to the contrairy.'

'Good,' said the Jew; 'there's no moon.'

'No,' rejoined Sikes.

'It's all arranged about bringing off the swag, is it?' asked the Jew.

Sikes nodded.

'And about—'

'Oh, ah, it's all planned,' rejoined Sikes, interrupting him. 'Never mind particulars. You'd better bring the boy here to-morrow night. I shall get off the stone an hour arter daybreak. Then you hold your tongue, and keep the melting-pot ready, and that's all you'll have to do.'

After some discussion, in which all three took an active part, it was decided that Nancy should repair to the Jew's next evening when the night had set in, and bring Oliver away with her; Fagin craftily observing, that, if he evinced any disinclination to the task, he would be more willing to accompany the girl who had so recently interfered in his behalf, than anybody else. It was also solemnly arranged that poor Oliver should, for the purposes of the contemplated expedition, be unreservedly consigned to the care and custody of Mr. William Sikes; and further, that the said Sikes should deal with him as he thought fit; and should not be held responsible by the Jew for any mischance or evil that might be necessary to visit him: it being understood that, to render the compact in this respect binding, any representations made by Mr. Sikes on his return should be required to be confirmed and corroborated, in all important particulars, by the testimony of flash Toby Crackit.

These preliminaries adjusted, Mr. Sikes proceeded to drink brandy at a furious rate, and to flourish the crowbar in an alarming manner; yelling forth, at the same time, most unmusical snatches of song, mingled with wild execrations. At length, in a fit of professional enthusiasm, he insisted upon producing his box of housebreaking tools: which he had no sooner stumbled in with, and opened for the purpose of explaining the nature and properties of the various implements it contained, and the peculiar beauties of their construction, than he fell over the box upon the floor, and went to sleep

where he fell.

‘Good-night, Nancy,’ said the Jew, muffling himself up as before.

‘Good-night.’

Their eyes met, and the Jew scrutinised her, narrowly. There was no flinching about the girl. She was as true and earnest in the matter as Toby Crackit himself could be.

The Jew again bade her good-night, and, bestowing a sly kick upon the prostrate form of Mr. Sikes while her back was turned, groped downstairs.

‘Always the way!’ muttered the Jew to himself as he turned homeward. ‘The worst of these women is, that a very little thing serves to call up some long-forgotten feeling; and, the best of them is, that it never lasts. Ha! ha! The man against the child, for a bag of gold!’

Beguiling the time with these pleasant reflections, Mr. Fagin wended his way, through mud and mire, to his gloomy abode: where the Dodger was sitting up, impatiently awaiting his return.

‘Is Oliver a-bed? I want to speak to him,’ was his first remark as they descended the stairs.

‘Hours ago,’ replied the Dodger, throwing open a door. ‘Here he is!’

The boy was lying, fast asleep, on a rude bed upon the floor; so pale with anxiety, and sadness, and the closeness of his prison, that he looked like death; not death as it shows in shroud and coffin, but in the guise it wears when life has just departed; when a young and gentle spirit has, but an instant, fled to Heaven, and the gross air of the world has not had time to breathe upon the changing dust it hallowed.

‘Not now,’ said the Jew, turning softly away. ‘To-morrow. To-morrow.’

CHAPTER XX

WHEN OLIVER AWOKE IN the morning, he was a good deal surprised to find that a new pair of shoes, with strong thick soles, had been placed at his bedside; and that his old shoes had been removed. At first, he was pleased with the discovery: hoping that it might be the forerunner of his release; but such thoughts were quickly dispelled, on his sitting down to breakfast along with the Jew, who told him, in a tone and manner which increased his alarm, that he was to be taken to the residence of Bill Sikes that night.

‘To—to—stop there, sir?’ asked Oliver, anxiously.

‘No, no, my dear. Not to stop there,’ replied the Jew. ‘We shouldn’t like to lose you. Don’t be afraid, Oliver, you shall come back to us again. Ha! ha! ha! We won’t be so cruel as to send you away, my dear. Oh no, no!’

The old man, who was stooping over the fire toasting a piece of bread, looked round as he bantered Oliver thus; and chuckled as if to show that he knew he would still be very glad to get away if he could.

‘I suppose,’ said the Jew, fixing his eyes on Oliver, ‘you want to know what you’re going to Bill’s for—eh, my dear?’

Oliver coloured, involuntarily, to find that the old thief had been reading his thoughts; but boldly said, Yes, he did want to know.

‘Why, do you think?’ inquired Fagin, parrying the question.

‘Indeed I don’t know, sir,’ replied Oliver.

‘Bah!’ said the Jew, turning away with a disappointed countenance from a close perusal of the boy’s face. ‘Wait till Bill tells you, then.’

The Jew seemed much vexed by Oliver’s not expressing any greater curiosity on the subject; but the truth is, that, although Oliver felt very anxious, he was too much confused by the earnest cunning of Fagin’s looks, and his own speculations, to make any further inquiries just then. He had no other opportunity: for the Jew remained very surly and silent till night:

when he prepared to go abroad.

‘You may burn a candle,’ said the Jew, putting one upon the table. ‘And here’s a book for you to read, till they come to fetch you. Good-night!’

‘Good-night!’ replied Oliver, softly.

The Jew walked to the door: looking over his shoulder at the boy as he went. Suddenly stopping, he called him by his name.

Oliver looked up; the Jew, pointing to the candle, motioned him to light it. He did so; and, as he placed the candlestick upon the table, saw that the Jew was gazing fixedly at him, with lowering and contracted brows, from the dark end of the room.

‘Take heed, Oliver! take heed!’ said the old man, shaking his right hand before him in a warning manner. ‘He’s a rough man, and thinks nothing of blood when his own is up. Whatever falls out, say nothing; and do what he bids you. Mind!’ Placing a strong emphasis on the last word, he suffered his features gradually to resolve themselves into a ghastly grin, and, nodding his head, left the room.

Oliver leaned his head upon his hand when the old man disappeared, and pondered, with a trembling heart, on the words he had just heard. The more he thought of the Jew’s admonition, the more he was at a loss to divine its real purpose and meaning.

He could think of no bad object to be attained by sending him to Sikes, which would not be equally well answered by his remaining with Fagin; and after meditating for a long time, concluded that he had been selected to perform some ordinary menial offices for the housebreaker, until another boy, better suited for his purpose could be engaged. He was too well accustomed to suffering, and had suffered too much where he was, to bewail the prospect of change very severely. He remained lost in thought for some minutes; and then, with a heavy sigh, snuffed the candle, and, taking up the book which the Jew had left with him, began to read.

He turned over the leaves. Carelessly at first; but, lighting on a passage which attracted his attention, he soon became intent upon the volume. It was a history of the lives and trials of great criminals; and the pages were soiled and thumbed with use. Here, he read of dreadful crimes that made the blood run cold; of secret murders that had been committed by the lonely wayside; of bodies hidden from the eye of man in deep pits and wells: which would not keep them down, deep as they were, but had yielded them

up at last, after many years, and so maddened the murderers with the sight, that in their horror they had confessed their guilt, and yelled for the gibbet to end their agony. Here, too, he read of men who, lying in their beds at dead of night, had been tempted (so they said) and led on, by their own bad thoughts, to such dreadful bloodshed as it made the flesh creep, and the limbs quail, to think of. The terrible descriptions were so real and vivid, that the sallow pages seemed to turn red with gore; and the words upon them, to be sounded in his ears, as if they were whispered, in hollow murmurs, by the spirits of the dead.

In a paroxysm of fear, the boy closed the book, and thrust it from him. Then, falling upon his knees, he prayed Heaven to spare him from such deeds; and rather to will that he should die at once, than be reserved for crimes, so fearful and appalling. By degrees, he grew more calm, and besought, in a low and broken voice, that he might be rescued from his present dangers; and that if any aid were to be raised up for a poor outcast boy who had never known the love of friends or kindred, it might come to him now, when, desolate and deserted, he stood alone in the midst of wickedness and guilt.

He had concluded his prayer, but still remained with his head buried in his hands, when a rustling noise aroused him.

‘What’s that!’ he cried, starting up, and catching sight of a figure standing by the door. ‘Who’s there?’

‘Me. Only me,’ replied a tremulous voice.

Oliver raised the candle above his head: and looked towards the door. It was Nancy.

‘Put down the light,’ said the girl, turning away her head. ‘It hurts my eyes.’

Oliver saw that she was very pale, and gently inquired if she were ill. The girl threw herself into a chair, with her back towards him: and wrung her hands; but made no reply.

‘God forgive me!’ she cried after a while, ‘I never thought of this.’

‘Has anything happened?’ asked Oliver. ‘Can I help you? I will if I can. I will, indeed.’

She rocked herself to and fro; caught her throat; and, uttering a gurgling sound, gasped for breath.

‘Nancy!’ cried Oliver, ‘What is it?’

The girl beat her hands upon her knees, and her feet upon the ground; and, suddenly stopping, drew her shawl close round her: and shivered with cold.

Oliver stirred the fire. Drawing her chair close to it, she sat there, for a little time, without speaking; but at length she raised her head, and looked round.

‘I don’t know what comes over me sometimes,’ said she, affecting to busy herself in arranging her dress; ‘it’s this damp dirty room, I think. Now, Nolly, dear, are you ready?’

‘Am I to go with you?’ asked Oliver.

‘Yes. I have come from Bill,’ replied the girl. ‘You are to go with me.’

‘What for?’ asked Oliver, recoiling.

‘What for?’ echoed the girl, raising her eyes, and averting them again, the moment they encountered the boy’s face. ‘Oh! For no harm.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ said Oliver: who had watched her closely.

‘Have it your own way,’ rejoined the girl, affecting to laugh. ‘For no good, then.’

Oliver could see that he had some power over the girl’s better feelings, and, for an instant, thought of appealing to her compassion for his helpless state. But, then, the thought darted across his mind that it was barely eleven o’clock; and that many people were still in the streets: of whom surely some might be found to give credence to his tale. As the reflection occured to him, he stepped forward: and said, somewhat hastily, that he was ready.

Neither his brief consideration, nor its purport, was lost on his companion. She eyed him narrowly, while he spoke; and cast upon him a look of intelligence which sufficiently showed that she guessed what had been passing in his thoughts.

‘Hush!’ said the girl, stooping over him, and pointing to the door as she looked cautiously round. ‘You can’t help yourself. I have tried hard for you, but all to no purpose. You are hedged round and round. If ever you are to get loose from here, this is not the time.’

Struck by the energy of her manner, Oliver looked up in her face with great surprise. She seemed to speak the truth; her countenance was white and agitated; and she trembled with very earnestness.

‘I have saved you from being ill-used once, and I will again, and I do now,’ continued the girl aloud; ‘for those who would have fetched you, if I

had not, would have been far more rough than me. I have promised for your being quiet and silent; if you are not, you will only do harm to yourself and me too, and perhaps be my death. See here! I have borne all this for you already, as true as God sees me show it.'

She pointed, hastily, to some livid bruises on her neck and arms; and continued, with great rapidity:

'Remember this! And don't let me suffer more for you, just now. If I could help you, I would; but I have not the power. They don't mean to harm you; whatever they make you do, is no fault of yours. Hush! Every word from you is a blow for me. Give me your hand. Make haste! Your hand!'

She caught the hand which Oliver instinctively placed in hers, and, blowing out the light, drew him after her up the stairs. The door was opened, quickly, by some one shrouded in the darkness, and was as quickly closed, when they had passed out. A hackney-cabriolet was in waiting; with the same vehemence which she had exhibited in addressing Oliver, the girl pulled him in with her, and drew the curtains close. The driver wanted no directions, but lashed his horse into full speed, without the delay of an instant.

The girl still held Oliver fast by the hand, and continued to pour into his ear, the warnings and assurances she had already imparted. All was so quick and hurried, that he had scarcely time to recollect where he was, or how he came there, when the carriage stopped at the house to which the Jew's steps had been directed on the previous evening.

For one brief moment, Oliver cast a hurried glance along the empty street, and a cry for help hung upon his lips. But the girl's voice was in his ear, beseeching him in such tones of agony to remember her, that he had not the heart to utter it. While he hesitated, the opportunity was gone; he was already in the house, and the door was shut.

'This way,' said the girl, releasing her hold for the first time. 'Bill!'

'Hallo!' replied Sikes: appearing at the head of the stairs, with a candle. 'Oh! That's the time of day. Come on!'

This was a very strong expression of approbation, an uncommonly hearty welcome, from a person of Mr. Sikes' temperament. Nancy, appearing much gratified thereby, saluted him cordially.

'Bull's-eye's gone home with Tom,' observed Sikes, as he lighted them up. 'He'd have been in the way.'

‘That’s right,’ rejoined Nancy.

‘So you’ve got the kid,’ said Sikes when they had all reached the room: closing the door as he spoke.

‘Yes, here he is,’ replied Nancy.

‘Did he come quiet?’ inquired Sikes.

‘Like a lamb,’ rejoined Nancy.

‘I’m glad to hear it,’ said Sikes, looking grimly at Oliver; ‘for the sake of his young carcase: as would otherways have suffered for it. Come here, young ’un; and let me read you a lectur’, which is as well got over at once.’

Thus addressing his new pupil, Mr. Sikes pulled off Oliver’s cap and threw it into a corner; and then, taking him by the shoulder, sat himself down by the table, and stood the boy in front of him.

‘Now, first: do you know wot this is?’ inquired Sikes, taking up a pocket-pistol which lay on the table.

Oliver replied in the affirmative.

‘Well, then, look here,’ continued Sikes. ‘This is powder; that ’ere’s a bullet; and this is a little bit of a old hat for waddin’.’

Oliver murmured his comprehension of the different bodies referred to; and Mr. Sikes proceeded to load the pistol, with great nicety and deliberation.

‘Now it’s loaded,’ said Mr. Sikes, when he had finished.

‘Yes, I see it is, sir,’ replied Oliver.

‘Well,’ said the robber, grasping Oliver’s wrist, and putting the barrel so close to his temple that they touched; at which moment the boy could not repress a start; ‘if you speak a word when you’re out o’doors with me, except when I speak to you, that loading will be in your head without notice. So, if you *do* make up your mind to speak without leave, say your prayers first.’

Having bestowed a scowl upon the object of this warning, to increase its effect, Mr. Sikes continued.

‘As near as I know, there isn’t anybody as would be asking very partickler arter you, if you *was* disposed of; so I needn’t take this devil-and-all of trouble to explain matters to you, if it warn’t for your own good. D’ye hear me?’

‘The short and the long of what you mean,’ said Nancy: speaking very emphatically, and slightly frowning at Oliver as if to bespeak his serious

attention to her words: ‘is, that if you’re crossed by him in this job you have on hand, you’ll prevent his ever telling tales afterwards, by shooting him through the head, and will take your chance of swinging for it, as you do for a great many other things in the way of business, every month of your life.’

‘That’s it!’ observed Mr. Sikes, approvingly; ‘women can always put things in fewest words.—Except when it’s blowing up; and then they lengthens it out. And now that he’s thoroughly up to it, let’s have some supper, and get a snooze before starting.’

In pursuance of this request, Nancy quickly laid the cloth; disappearing for a few minutes, she presently returned with a pot of porter and a dish of sheep’s heads: which gave occasion to several pleasant witticisms on the part of Mr. Sikes, founded upon the singular coincidence of ‘jemmies’ being a can name, common to them, and also to an ingenious implement much used in his profession. Indeed, the worthy gentleman, stimulated perhaps by the immediate prospect of being on active service, was in great spirits and good humour; in proof whereof, it may be here remarked, that he humourously drank all the beer at a draught, and did not utter, on a rough calculation, more than four-score oaths during the whole progress of the meal.

Supper being ended—it may be easily conceived that Oliver had no great appetite for it—Mr. Sikes disposed of a couple of glasses of spirits and water, and threw himself on the bed; ordering Nancy, with many imprecations in case of failure, to call him at five precisely. Oliver stretched himself in his clothes, by command of the same authority, on a mattress upon the floor; and the girl, mending the fire, sat before it, in readiness to rouse them at the appointed time.

For a long time Oliver lay awake, thinking it not impossible that Nancy might seek that opportunity of whispering some further advice; but the girl sat brooding over the fire, without moving, save now and then to trim the light. Weary with watching and anxiety, he at length fell asleep.

When he awoke, the table was covered with tea-things, and Sikes was thrusting various articles into the pockets of his great-coat, which hung over the back of a chair. Nancy was busily engaged in preparing breakfast. It was not yet daylight; for the candle was still burning, and it was quite dark outside. A sharp rain, too, was beating against the window-panes; and the sky looked black and cloudy.

‘Now, then!’ growled Sikes, as Oliver started up; ‘half-past five! Look sharp, or you’ll get no breakfast; for it’s late as it is.’

Oliver was not long in making his toilet; having taken some breakfast, he replied to a surly inquiry from Sikes, by saying that he was quite ready.

Nancy, scarcely looking at the boy, threw him a handkerchief to tie round his throat; Sikes gave him a large rough cape to button over his shoulders. Thus attired, he gave his hand to the robber, who, merely pausing to show him with a menacing gesture that he had that same pistol in a side-pocket of his great-coat, clasped it firmly in his, and, exchanging a farewell with Nancy, led him away.

Oliver turned, for an instant, when they reached the door, in the hope of meeting a look from the girl. But she had resumed her old seat in front of the fire, and sat, perfectly motionless before it.

CHAPTER XXI

IT WAS A CHEERLESS morning when they got into the street; blowing and raining hard; and the clouds looking dull and stormy. The night had been very wet: large pools of water had collected in the road: and the kennels were overflowing. There was a faint glimmering of the coming day in the sky; but it rather aggravated than relieved the gloom of the scene: the sombre light only serving to pale that which the street lamps afforded, without shedding any warmer or brighter tints upon the wet house-tops, and dreary streets. There appeared to be nobody stirring in that quarter of the town; the windows of the houses were all closely shut; and the streets through which they passed, were noiseless and empty.

By the time they had turned into the Bethnal Green Road, the day had fairly begun to break. Many of the lamps were already extinguished; a few country waggons were slowly toiling on, towards London; now and then, a stage-coach, covered with mud, rattled briskly by: the driver bestowing, as he passed, an admonitory lash upon the heavy waggoner who, by keeping on the wrong side of the road, had endangered his arriving at the office, a quarter of a minute after his time. The public-houses, with gas-lights burning inside, were already open. By degrees, other shops began to be unclosed, and a few scattered people were met with. Then, came straggling groups of labourers going to their work; then, men and women with fish-baskets on their heads; donkey-carts laden with vegetables; chaise-carts filled with live-stock or whole carcasses of meat; milk-women with pails; an unbroken concourse of people, trudging out with various supplies to the eastern suburbs of the town. As they approached the City, the noise and traffic gradually increased; when they threaded the streets between Shoreditch and Smithfield, it had swelled into a roar of sound and bustle. It was as light as it was likely to be, till night came on again, and the busy

morning of half the London population had begun.

Turning down Sun Street and Crown Street, and crossing Finsbury square, Mr. Sikes struck, by way of Chiswell Street, into Barbican: thence into Long Lane, and so into Smithfield; from which latter place arose a tumult of discordant sounds that filled Oliver Twist with amazement.

It was market-morning. The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire; a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog, which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above. All the pens in the centre of the large area, and as many temporary pens as could be crowded into the vacant space, were filled with sheep; tied up to posts by the gutter side were long lines of beasts and oxen, three or four deep. Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a mass; the whistling of drovers, the barking dogs, the bellowing and plunging of the oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs, the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides; the ringing of bells and roar of voices, that issued from every public-house; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping and yelling; the hideous and discordant dim that resounded from every corner of the market; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro, and bursting in and out of the throng; rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses.

Mr. Sikes, dragging Oliver after him, elbowed his way through the thickest of the crowd, and bestowed very little attention on the numerous sights and sounds, which so astonished the boy. He nodded, twice or thrice, to a passing friend; and, resisting as many invitations to take a morning dram, pressed steadily onward, until they were clear of the turmoil, and had made their way through Hosier Lane into Holborn.

‘Now, young ’un!’ said Sikes, looking up at the clock of St. Andrew’s Church, ‘hard upon seven! you must step out. Come, don’t lag behind already, Lazy-legs!’

Mr. Sikes accompanied this speech with a jerk at his little companion’s wrist; Oliver, quickening his pace into a kind of trot between a fast walk and a run, kept up with the rapid strides of the house-breaker as well as he could.

They held their course at this rate, until they had passed Hyde Park corner, and were on their way to Kensington: when Sikes relaxed his pace, until an empty cart which was at some little distance behind, came up. Seeing ‘Hounslow’ written on it, he asked the driver with as much civility as he could assume, if he would give them a lift as far as Isleworth.

‘Jump up,’ said the man. ‘Is that your boy?’

‘Yes; he’s my boy,’ replied Sikes, looking hard at Oliver, and putting his hand abstractedly into the pocket where the pistol was.

‘Your father walks rather too quick for you, don’t he, my man?’ inquired the driver: seeing that Oliver was out of breath.

‘Not a bit of it,’ replied Sikes, interposing. ‘He’s used to it.

Here, take hold of my hand, Ned. In with you!’

Thus addressing Oliver, he helped him into the cart; and the driver, pointing to a heap of sacks, told him to lie down there, and rest himself.

As they passed the different mile-stones, Oliver wondered, more and more, where his companion meant to take him. Kensington, Hammersmith, Chiswick, Kew Bridge, Brentford, were all passed; and yet they went on as steadily as if they had only just begun their journey. At length, they came to a public-house called the Coach and Horses; a little way beyond which, another road appeared to run off. And here, the cart stopped.

Sikes dismounted with great precipitation, holding Oliver by the hand all the while; and lifting him down directly, bestowed a furious look upon him, and rapped the side-pocket with his fist, in a significant manner.

‘Good-bye, boy,’ said the man.

‘He’s sulky,’ replied Sikes, giving him a shake; ‘he’s sulky. A young dog! Don’t mind him.’

‘Not I!’ rejoined the other, getting into his cart. ‘It’s a fine day, after all.’ And he drove away.

Sikes waited until he had fairly gone; and then, telling Oliver he might look about him if he wanted, once again led him onward on his journey.

They turned round to the left, a short way past the public-house; and then, taking a right-hand road, walked on for a long time: passing many large gardens and gentlemen’s houses on both sides of the way, and stopping for nothing but a little beer, until they reached a town. Here against the wall of a house, Oliver saw written up in pretty large letters, ‘Hampton.’ They lingered about, in the fields, for some hours. At length they came back

into the town; and, turning into an old public-house with a defaced sign-board, ordered some dinner by the kitchen fire.

The kitchen was an old, low-roofed room; with a great beam across the middle of the ceiling, and benches, with high backs to them, by the fire; on which were seated several rough men in smock-frocks, drinking and smoking. They took no notice of Oliver; and very little of Sikes; and, as Sikes took very little notice of them, he and his young comrade sat in a corner by themselves, without being much troubled by their company.

They had some cold meat for dinner, and sat so long after it, while Mr. Sikes indulged himself with three or four pipes, that Oliver began to feel quite certain they were not going any further. Being much tired with the walk, and getting up so early, he dozed a little at first; then, quite overpowered by fatigue and the fumes of the tobacco, fell asleep.

It was quite dark when he was awakened by a push from Sikes. Rousing himself sufficiently to sit up and look about him, he found that worthy in close fellowship and communication with a labouring man, over a pint of ale.

‘So, you’re going on to Lower Halliford, are you?’ inquired Sikes.

‘Yes, I am,’ replied the man, who seemed a little the worse—or better, as the case might be—for drinking; ‘and not slow about it neither. My horse hasn’t got a load behind him going back, as he had coming up in the mornin’; and he won’t be long a-doing of it. Here’s luck to him. Ecod! he’s a good ’un!’

‘Could you give my boy and me a lift as far as there?’ demanded Sikes, pushing the ale towards his new friend.

‘If you’re going directly, I can,’ replied the man, looking out of the pot. ‘Are you going to Halliford?’

‘Going on to Shepperton,’ replied Sikes.

‘I’m your man, as far as I go,’ replied the other. ‘Is all paid, Becky?’

‘Yes, the other gentleman’s paid,’ replied the girl.

‘I say!’ said the man, with tipsy gravity; ‘that won’t do, you know.’

‘Why not?’ rejoined Sikes. ‘You’re a-going to accommodate us, and wot’s to prevent my standing treat for a pint or so, in return?’

The stranger reflected upon this argument, with a very profound face; having done so, he seized Sikes by the hand: and declared he was a real good fellow. To which Mr. Sikes replied, he was joking; as, if he had been

sober, there would have been strong reason to suppose he was.

After the exchange of a few more compliments, they bade the company good-night, and went out; the girl gathering up the pots and glasses as they did so, and lounging out to the door, with her hands full, to see the party start.

The horse, whose health had been drunk in his absence, was standing outside: ready harnessed to the cart. Oliver and Sikes got in without any further ceremony; and the man to whom he belonged, having lingered for a minute or two ‘to bear him up,’ and to defy the hostler and the world to produce his equal, mounted also. Then, the hostler was told to give the horse his head; and, his head being given him, he made a very unpleasant use of it: tossing it into the air with great disdain, and running into the parlour windows over the way; after performing those feats, and supporting himself for a short time on his hind-legs, he started off at great speed, and rattled out of the town right gallantly.

The night was very dark. A damp mist rose from the river, and the marshy ground about; and spread itself over the dreary fields. It was piercing cold, too; all was gloomy and black. Not a word was spoken; for the driver had grown sleepy; and Sikes was in no mood to lead him into conversation. Oliver sat huddled together, in a corner of the cart; bewildered with alarm and apprehension; and figuring strange objects in the gaunt trees, whose branches waved grimly to and fro, as if in some fantastic joy at the desolation of the scene.

As they passed Sunbury Church, the clock struck seven. There was a light in the ferry-house window opposite: which streamed across the road, and threw into more sombre shadow a dark yew-tree with graves beneath it. There was a dull sound of falling water not far off; and the leaves of the old tree stirred gently in the night wind. It seemed like quiet music for the repose of the dead.

Sunbury was passed through, and they came again into the lonely road. Two or three miles more, and the cart stopped. Sikes alighted, took Oliver by the hand, and they once again walked on.

They turned into no house at Shepperton, as the weary boy had expected; but still kept walking on, in mud and darkness, through gloomy lanes and over cold open wastes, until they came within sight of the lights of a town at no great distance. On looking intently forward, Oliver saw that the water

was just below them, and that they were coming to the foot of a bridge.

Sikes kept straight on, until they were close upon the bridge; then turned suddenly down a bank upon the left.

‘The water!’ thought Oliver, turning sick with fear. ‘He has brought me to this lonely place to murder me!’

He was about to throw himself on the ground, and make one struggle for his young life, when he saw that they stood before a solitary house: all ruinous and decayed. There was a window on each side of the dilapidated entrance; and one story above; but no light was visible. The house was dark, dismantled: and the all appearance, uninhabited.

Sikes, with Oliver’s hand still in his, softly approached the low porch, and raised the latch. The door yielded to the pressure, and they passed in together.

CHAPTER XXII

‘HALLO!’ CRIED A LOUD, hoarse voice, as soon as they set foot in the passage.

‘Don’t make such a row,’ said Sikes, bolting the door. ‘Show a glim, Toby.’

‘Aha! my pal!’ cried the same voice. ‘A glim, Barney, a glim! Show the gentleman in, Barney; wake up first, if convenient.’

The speaker appeared to throw a boot-jack, or some such article, at the person he addressed, to rouse him from his slumbers: for the noise of a wooden body, falling violently, was heard; and then an indistinct muttering, as of a man between sleep and awake.

‘Do you hear?’ cried the same voice. ‘There’s Bill Sikes in the passage with nobody to do the civil to him; and you sleeping there, as if you took laudanum with your meals, and nothing stronger. Are you any fresher now, or do you want the iron candlestick to wake you thoroughly?’

A pair of slipshod feet shuffled, hastily, across the bare floor of the room, as this interrogatory was put; and there issued, from a door on the right hand; first, a feeble candle: and next, the form of the same individual who has been heretofore described as labouring under the infirmity of speaking through his nose, and officiating as waiter at the public-house on Saffron Hill.

‘Bister Sikes!’ exclaimed Barney, with real or counterfeit joy; ‘cub id, sir; cub id.’

‘Here! you get on first,’ said Sikes, putting Oliver in front of him. ‘Quicker! or I shall tread upon your heels.’

Muttering a curse upon his tardiness, Sikes pushed Oliver before him; and they entered a low dark room with a smoky fire, two or three broken chairs, a table, and a very old couch: on which, with his legs much higher

than his head, a man was reposing at full length, smoking a long clay pipe. He was dressed in a smartly-cut snuff-coloured coat, with large brass buttons; an orange neckerchief; a coarse, staring, shawl-pattern waistcoat; and drab breeches. Mr. Crackit (for he it was) had no very great quantity of hair, either upon his head or face; but what he had, was of a reddish dye, and tortured into long corkscrew curls, through which he occasionally thrust some very dirty fingers, ornamented with large common rings. He was a trifle above the middle size, and apparently rather weak in the legs; but this circumstance by no means detracted from his own admiration of his top-boots, which he contemplated, in their elevated situation, with lively satisfaction.

‘Bill, my boy!’ said this figure, turning his head towards the door, ‘I’m glad to see you. I was almost afraid you’d given it up: in which case I should have made a personal wentur. Hallo!’

Uttering this exclamation in a tone of great surprise, as his eyes rested on Oliver, Mr. Toby Crackit brought himself into a sitting posture, and demanded who that was.

‘The boy. Only the boy!’ replied Sikes, drawing a chair towards the fire.

‘Wud of Bister Fagid’s lads,’ exclaimed Barney, with a grin.

‘Fagin’s, eh!’ exclaimed Toby, looking at Oliver. ‘Wot an inwalable boy that’ll make, for the old ladies’ pockets in chapels! His mug is a fortin’ to him.’

‘There—there’s enough of that,’ interposed Sikes, impatiently; and stooping over his recumbant friend, he whispered a few words in his ear: at which Mr. Crackit laughed immensely, and honoured Oliver with a long stare of astonishment.

‘Now,’ said Sikes, as he resumed his seat, ‘if you’ll give us something to eat and drink while we’re waiting, you’ll put some heart in us; or in me, at all events. Sit down by the fire, younker, and rest yourself; for you’ll have to go out with us again to-night, though not very far off.’

Oliver looked at Sikes, in mute and timid wonder; and drawing a stool to the fire, sat with his aching head upon his hands, scarecely knowing where he was, or what was passing around him.

‘Here,’ said Toby, as the young Jew placed some fragments of food, and a bottle upon the table, ‘Success to the crack!’ He rose to honour the toast; and, carefully depositing his empty pipe in a corner, advanced to the table,

filled a glass with spirits, and drank off its contents. Mr. Sikes did the same.

‘A drain for the boy,’ said Toby, half-filling a wine-glass. ‘Down with it, innocence.’

‘Indeed,’ said Oliver, looking piteously up into the man’s face; ‘indeed, I —’

‘Down with it!’ echoed Toby. ‘Do you think I don’t know what’s good for you? Tell him to drink it, Bill.’

‘He had better!’ said Sikes clapping his hand upon his pocket. ‘Burn my body, if he isn’t more trouble than a whole family of Dodgers. Drink it, you perwerse imp; drink it!’

Frightened by the menacing gestures of the two men, Oliver hastily swallowed the contents of the glass, and immediately fell into a violent fit of coughing: which delighted Toby Crackit and Barney, and even drew a smile from the surly Mr. Sikes.

This done, and Sikes having satisfied his appetite (Oliver could eat nothing but a small crust of bread which they made him swallow), the two men laid themselves down on chairs for a short nap. Oliver retained his stool by the fire; Barney wrapped in a blanket, stretched himself on the floor: close outside the fender.

They slept, or appeared to sleep, for some time; nobody stirring but Barney, who rose once or twice to throw coals on the fire. Oliver fell into a heavy doze: imagining himself straying along the gloomy lanes, or wandering about the dark churchyard, or retracing some one or other of the scenes of the past day: when he was roused by Toby Crackit jumping up and declaring it was half-past one.

In an instant, the other two were on their legs, and all were actively engaged in busy preparation. Sikes and his companion enveloped their necks and chins in large dark shawls, and drew on their great-coats; Barney, opening a cupboard, brought forth several articles, which he hastily crammed into the pockets.

‘Barkers for me, Barney,’ said Toby Crackit.

‘Here they are,’ replied Barney, producing a pair of pistols. ‘You loaded them yourself.’

‘All right!’ replied Toby, stowing them away. ‘The persuaders?’

‘I’ve got ’em,’ replied Sikes.

‘Crape, keys, centre-bits, darkies—nothing forgotten?’ inquired Toby:

fastening a small crowbar to a loop inside the skirt of his coat.

‘All right,’ rejoined his companion. ‘Bring them bits of timber, Barney. That’s the time of day.’

With these words, he took a thick stick from Barney’s hands, who, having delivered another to Toby, busied himself in fastening on Oliver’s cape.

‘Now then!’ said Sikes, holding out his hand.

Oliver: who was completely stupified by the unwonted exercise, and the air, and the drink which had been forced upon him: put his hand mechanically into that which Sikes extended for the purpose.

‘Take his other hand, Toby,’ said Sikes. ‘Look out, Barney.’

The man went to the door, and returned to announce that all was quiet. The two robbers issued forth with Oliver between them. Barney, having made all fast, rolled himself up as before, and was soon asleep again.

It was now intensely dark. The fog was much heavier than it had been in the early part of the night; and the atmosphere was so damp, that, although no rain fell, Oliver’s hair and eyebrows, within a few minutes after leaving the house, had become stiff with the half-frozen moisture that was floating about. They crossed the bridge, and kept on towards the lights which he had seen before. They were at no great distance off; and, as they walked pretty briskly, they soon arrived at Chertsey.

‘Slap through the town,’ whispered Sikes; ‘there’ll be nobody in the way, to-night, to see us.’

Toby acquiesced; and they hurried through the main street of the little town, which at that late hour was wholly deserted. A dim light shone at intervals from some bed-room window; and the hoarse barking of dogs occasionally broke the silence of the night. But there was nobody abroad. They had cleared the town, as the church-bell struck two.

Quickening their pace, they turned up a road upon the left hand. After walking about a quarter of a mile, they stopped before a detached house surrounded by a wall: to the top of which, Toby Crackit, scarcely pausing to take breath, climbed in a twinkling.

‘The boy next,’ said Toby. ‘Hoist him up; I’ll catch hold of him.’

Before Oliver had time to look round, Sikes had caught him under the arms; and in three or four seconds he and Toby were lying on the grass on the other side. Sikes followed directly. And they stole cautiously towards

the house.

And now, for the first time, Oliver, well-nigh mad with grief and terror, saw that housebreaking and robbery, if not murder, were the objects of the expedition. He clasped his hands together, and involuntarily uttered a subdued exclamation of horror. A mist came before his eyes; the cold sweat stood upon his ashy face; his limbs failed him; and he sank upon his knees.

‘Get up!’ murmured Sikes, trembling with rage, and drawing the pistol from his pocket; ‘Get up, or I’ll strew your brains upon the grass.’

‘Oh! for God’s sake let me go!’ cried Oliver; ‘let me run away and die in the fields. I will never come near London; never, never! Oh! pray have mercy on me, and do not make me steal. For the love of all the bright Angels that rest in Heaven, have mercy upon me!’

The man to whom this appeal was made, swore a dreadful oath, and had cocked the pistol, when Toby, striking it from his grasp, placed his hand upon the boy’s mouth, and dragged him to the house.

‘Hush!’ cried the man; ‘it won’t answer here. Say another word, and I’ll do your business myself with a crack on the head. That makes no noise, and is quite as certain, and more genteel. Here, Bill, wrench the shutter open. He’s game enough now, I’ll engage. I’ve seen older hands of his age took the same way, for a minute or two, on a cold night.’

Sikes, invoking terrific imprecations upon Fagin’s head for sending Oliver on such an errand, plied the crowbar vigorously, but with little noise. After some delay, and some assistance from Toby, the shutter to which he had referred, swung open on its hinges.

It was a little lattice window, about five feet and a half above the ground, at the back of the house: which belonged to a scullery, or small brewing-place, at the end of the passage. The aperture was so small, that the inmates had probably not thought it worth while to defend it more securely; but it was large enough to admit a boy of Oliver’s size, nevertheless. A very brief exercise of Mr. Sike’s art, sufficed to overcome the fastening of the lattice; and it soon stood wide open also.

‘Now listen, you young limb,’ whispered Sikes, drawing a dark lantern from his pocket, and throwing the glare full on Oliver’s face; ‘I’m a going to put you through there. Take this light; go softly up the steps straight afore you, and along the little hall, to the street door; unfasten it, and let us in.’

‘There’s a bolt at the top, you won’t be able to reach,’ interposed Toby.

‘Stand upon one of the hall chairs. There are three there, Bill, with a jolly large blue unicorn and gold pitchfork on ’em: which is the old lady’s arms.’

‘Keep quiet, can’t you?’ replied Sikes, with a threatening look. ‘The room-door is open, is it?’

‘Wide,’ replied Toby, after peeping in to satisfy himself. ‘The game of that is, that they always leave it open with a catch, so that the dog, who’s got a bed in here, may walk up and down the passage when he feels wakeful. Ha! ha! Barney ’ticed him away to-night. So neat!’

Although Mr. Crackit spoke in a scarcely audible whisper, and laughed without noise, Sikes imperiously commanded him to be silent, and to get to work. Toby complied, by first producing his lantern, and placing it on the ground; then by planting himself firmly with his head against the wall beneath the window, and his hands upon his knees, so as to make a step of his back. This was no sooner done, than Sikes, mounting upon him, put Oliver gently through the window with his feet first; and, without leaving hold of his collar, planted him safely on the floor inside.

‘Take this lantern,’ said Sikes, looking into the room. ‘You see the stairs afore you?’

Oliver, more dead than alive, gasped out, ‘Yes.’ Sikes, pointing to the street-door with the pistol-barrel, briefly advised him to take notice that he was within shot all the way; and that if he faltered, he would fall dead that instant.

‘It’s done in a minute,’ said Sikes, in the same low whisper. ‘Directly I leave go of you, do your work. Hark!’

‘What’s that?’ whispered the other man.

They listened intently.

‘Nothing,’ said Sikes, releasing his hold of Oliver. ‘Now!’

In the short time he had had to collect his senses, the boy had firmly resolved that, whether he died in the attempt or not, he would make one effort to dart upstairs from the hall, and alarm the family. Filled with this idea, he advanced at once, but stealthily.

‘Come back!’ suddenly cried Sikes aloud. ‘Back! back!’

Scared by the sudden breaking of the dead stillness of the place, and by a loud cry which followed it, Oliver let his lantern fall, and knew not whether to advance or fly.

The cry was repeated—a light appeared—a vision of two terrified half-

dressed men at the top of the stairs swam before his eyes—a flash—a loud noise—a smoke—a crash somewhere, but where he knew not,—and he staggered back.

Sikes had disappeared for an instant; but he was up again, and had him by the collar before the smoke had cleared away. He fired his own pistol after the men, who were already retreating; and dragged the boy up.

‘Clasp your arm tighter,’ said Sikes, as he drew him through the window. ‘Give me a shawl here. They’ve hit him. Quick! How the boy bleeds!’

Then came the loud ringing of a bell, mingled with the noise of fire-arms, and the shouts of men, and the sensation of being carried over uneven ground at a rapid pace. And then, the noises grew confused in the distance; and a cold deadly feeling crept over the boy’s heart; and he saw or heard no more.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NIGHT WAS BITTER cold. The snow lay on the ground, frozen into a hard thick crust, so that only the heaps that had drifted into byways and corners were affected by the sharp wind that howled abroad: which, as if expending increased fury on such prey as it found, caught it savagely up in clouds, and, whirling it into a thousand misty eddies, scattered it in air. Bleak, dark, and piercing cold, it was a night for the well-housed and fed to draw round the bright fire and thank God they were at home; and for the homeless, starving wretch to lay him down and die. Many hunger-worn outcasts close their eyes in our bare streets, at such times, who, let their crimes have been what they may, can hardly open them in a more bitter world.

Such was the aspect of out-of-doors affairs, when Mrs. Corney, the matron of the workhouse to which our readers have been already introduced as the birthplace of Oliver Twist, sat herself down before a cheerful fire in her own little room, and glanced, with no small degree of complacency, at a small round table: on which stood a tray of corresponding size, furnished with all necessary materials for the most grateful meal that matrons enjoy. In fact, Mrs. Corney was about to solace herself with a cup of tea. As she glanced from the table to the fireplace, where the smallest of all possible kettles was singing a small song in a small voice, her inward satisfaction evidently increased,—so much so, indeed, that Mrs. Corney smiled.

‘Well!’ said the matron, leaning her elbow on the table, and looking reflectively at the fire; ‘I’m sure we have all on us a great deal to be grateful for! A great deal, if we did but know it. Ah!’

Mrs. Corney shook her head mournfully, as if deploring the mental blindness of those paupers who did not know it; and thrusting a silver spoon (private property) into the inmost recesses of a two-ounce tin tea-caddy,

proceeded to make the tea.

How slight a thing will disturb the equanimity of our frail minds! The black teapot, being very small and easily filled, ran over while Mrs. Corney was moralising; and the water slightly scalded Mrs. Corney's hand.

'Drat the pot!' said the worthy matron, setting it down very hastily on the hob; 'a little stupid thing, that only holds a couple of cups! What use is it of, to anybody! Except,' said Mrs. Corney, pausing, 'except to a poor desolate creature like me. Oh dear!'

With these words, the matron dropped into her chair, and, once more resting her elbow on the table, thought of her solitary fate. The small teapot, and the single cup, had awakened in her mind sad recollections of Mr. Corney (who had not been dead more than five-and-twenty years); and she was overpowered.

'I shall never get another!' said Mrs. Corney, pettishly; 'I shall never get another—like him.'

Whether this remark bore reference to the husband, or the teapot, is uncertain. It might have been the latter; for Mrs. Corney looked at it as she spoke; and took it up afterwards. She had just tasted her first cup, when she was disturbed by a soft tap at the room-door.

'Oh, come in with you!' said Mrs. Corney, sharply. 'Some of the old women dying, I suppose. They always die when I'm at meals. Don't stand there, letting the cold air in, don't. What's amiss now, eh?'

'Nothing, ma'am, nothing,' replied a man's voice.

'Dear me!' exclaimed the matron, in a much sweeter tone, 'is that Mr. Bumble?'

'At your service, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble, who had been stopping outside to rub his shoes clean, and to shake the snow off his coat; and who now made his appearance, bearing the cocked hat in one hand and a bundle in the other. 'Shall I shut the door, ma'am?'

The lady modestly hesitated to reply, lest there should be any impropriety in holding an interview with Mr. Bumble, with closed doors. Mr. Bumble taking advantage of the hesitation, and being very cold himself, shut it without permission.

'Hard weather, Mr. Bumble,' said the matron.

'Hard, indeed, ma'am,' replied the beadle. 'Anti-porochial weather this, ma'am. We have given away, Mrs. Corney, we have given away a matter of

twenty quartern loaves and a cheese and a half, this very blessed afternoon; and yet them paupers are not contented.’

‘Of course not. When would they be, Mr. Bumble?’ said the matron, sipping her tea.

‘When, indeed, ma’am!’ rejoined Mr. Bumble. ‘Why here’s one man that, in consideration of his wife and large family, has a quartern loaf and a good pound of cheese, full weight. Is he grateful, ma’am? Is he grateful? Not a copper farthing’s worth of it! What does he do, ma’am, but ask for a few coals; if it’s only a pocket handkerchief full, he says! Coals! What would he do with coals? Toast his cheese with ’em and then come back for more. That’s the way with these people, ma’am; give ’em a apron full of coals to-day, and they’ll come back for another, the day after to-morrow, as brazen as alabaster.’

The matron expressed her entire concurrence in this intelligible simile; and the beadle went on.

‘I never,’ said Mr. Bumble, ‘see anything like the pitch it’s got to. The day afore yesterday, a man—you have been a married woman, ma’am, and I may mention it to you—a man, with hardly a rag upon his back (here Mrs. Corney looked at the floor), goes to our overseer’s door when he has got company coming to dinner; and says, he must be relieved, Mrs. Corney. As he wouldn’t go away, and shocked the company very much, our overseer sent him out a pound of potatoes and half a pint of oatmeal. “My heart!” says the ungrateful villain, “what’s the use of *this* to me? You might as well give me a pair of iron spectacles!” “Very good,” says our overseer, taking ’em away again, “you won’t get anything else here.” “Then I’ll die in the streets!” says the vagrant. “Oh no, you won’t,” says our overseer.’

‘Ha! ha! That was very good! So like Mr. Grannett, wasn’t it?’ interposed the matron. ‘Well, Mr. Bumble?’

‘Well, ma’am,’ rejoined the beadle, ‘he went away; and he *did* die in the streets. There’s a obstinate pauper for you!’

‘It beats anything I could have believed,’ observed the matron emphatically. ‘But don’t you think out-of-door relief a very bad thing, any way, Mr. Bumble? You’re a gentleman of experience, and ought to know. Come.’

‘Mrs. Corney,’ said the beadle, smiling as men smile who are conscious of superior information, ‘out-of-door relief, properly managed: properly

managed, ma’am: is the porochial safeguard. The great principle of out-of-door relief is, to give the paupers exactly what they don’t want; and then they get tired of coming.’

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed Mrs. Corney. ‘Well, that is a good one, too!’

‘Yes. Betwixt you and me, ma’am,’ returned Mr. Bumble, ‘that’s the great principle; and that’s the reason why, if you look at any cases that get into them owdacious newspapers, you’ll always observe that sick families have been relieved with slices of cheese. That’s the rule now, Mrs. Corney, all over the country. But, however,’ said the beadle, stopping to unpack his bundle, ‘these are official secrets, ma’am; not to be spoken of; except, as I may say, among the porochial officers, such as ourselves. This is the port wine, ma’am, that the board ordered for the infirmary; real, fresh, genuine port wine; only out of the cask this forenoon; clear as a bell, and no sediment!’

Having held the first bottle up to the light, and shaken it well to test its excellence, Mr. Bumble placed them both on top of a chest of drawers; folded the handkerchief in which they had been wrapped; put it carefully in his pocket; and took up his hat, as if to go.

‘You’ll have a very cold walk, Mr. Bumble,’ said the matron.

‘It blows, ma’am,’ replied Mr. Bumble, turning up his coat-collar, ‘enough to cut one’s ears off.’

The matron looked, from the little kettle, to the beadle, who was moving towards the door; and as the beadle coughed, preparatory to bidding her good-night, bashfully inquired whether—whether he wouldn’t take a cup of tea?

Mr. Bumble instantaneously turned back his collar again; laid his hat and stick upon a chair; and drew another chair up to the table. As he slowly seated himself, he looked at the lady. She fixed her eyes upon the little teapot. Mr. Bumble coughed again, and slightly smiled.

Mrs. Corney rose to get another cup and saucer from the closet. As she sat down, her eyes once again encountered those of the gallant beadle; she coloured, and applied herself to the task of making his tea. Again Mr. Bumble coughed—louder this time than he had coughed yet.

‘Sweet? Mr. Bumble?’ inquired the matron, taking up the sugar-basin.

‘Very sweet, indeed, ma’am,’ replied Mr. Bumble. He fixed his eyes on Mrs. Corney as he said this; and if ever a beadle looked tender, Mr. Bumble

was that beadle at that moment.

The tea was made, and handed in silence. Mr. Bumble, having spread a handkerchief over his knees to prevent the crumbs from sullying the splendour of his shorts, began to eat and drink; varying these amusements, occasionally, by fetching a deep sigh; which, however, had no injurious effect upon his appetite, but, on the contrary, rather seemed to facilitate his operations in the tea and toast department.

‘You have a cat, ma’am, I see,’ said Mr. Bumble, glancing at one who, in the centre of her family, was basking before the fire; ‘and kittens too, I declare!’

‘I am so fond of them, Mr. Bumble, you can’t think,’ replied the matron. ‘They’re *so* happy, *so* frolicsome, and *so* cheerful, that they are quite companions for me.’

‘Very nice animals, ma’am,’ replied Mr. Bumble, approvingly; ‘so very domestic.’

‘Oh, yes!’ rejoined the matron with enthusiasm; ‘so fond of their home too, that it’s quite a pleasure, I’m sure.’

‘Mrs. Corney, ma’am,’ said Mr. Bumble, slowly, and marking the time with his teaspoon, ‘I mean to say this, ma’am; that any cat, or kitten, that could live with you, ma’am, and *not* be fond of its home, must be a ass, ma’am.’

‘Oh, Mr. Bumble!’ remonstrated Mrs. Corney.

‘It’s of no use disguising facts, ma’am,’ said Mr. Bumble, slowly flourishing the teaspoon with a kind of amorous dignity which made him doubly impressive; ‘I would drown it myself, with pleasure.’

‘Then you’re a cruel man,’ said the matron vivaciously, as she held out her hand for the beadle’s cup; ‘and a very hard-hearted man besides.’

‘Hard-hearted, ma’am?’ said Mr. Bumble. ‘Hard?’ Mr. Bumble resigned his cup without another word; squeezed Mrs. Corney’s little finger as she took it; and inflicting two open-handed slaps upon his laced waistcoat, gave a mighty sigh, and hitched his chair a very little morsel farther from the fire.

It was a round table; and as Mrs. Corney and Mr. Bumble had been sitting opposite each other, with no great space between them, and fronting the fire, it will be seen that Mr. Bumble, in receding from the fire, and still keeping at the table, increased the distance between himself and Mrs. Corney; which proceeding, some prudent readers will doubtless be disposed

to admire, and to consider an act of great heroism on Mr. Bumble's part: he being in some sort tempted by time, place, and opportunity, to give utterance to certain soft nothings, which however well they may become the lips of the light and thoughtless, do seem immeasurably beneath the dignity of judges of the land, members of parliament, ministers of state, lord mayors, and other great public functionaries, but more particularly beneath the stateliness and gravity of a beadle: who (as is well known) should be the sternest and most inflexible among them all.

Whatever were Mr. Bumble's intentions, however (and no doubt they were of the best): it unfortunately happened, as has been twice before remarked, that the table was a round one; consequently Mr. Bumble, moving his chair by little and little, soon began to diminish the distance between himself and the matron; and, continuing to travel round the outer edge of the circle, brought his chair, in time, close to that in which the matron was seated.

Indeed, the two chairs touched; and when they did so, Mr. Bumble stopped.

Now, if the matron had moved her chair to the right, she would have been scorched by the fire; and if to the left, she must have fallen into Mr. Bumble's arms; so (being a discreet matron, and no doubt foreseeing these consequences at a glance) she remained where she was, and handed Mr. Bumble another cup of tea.

'Hard-hearted, Mrs. Corney?' said Mr. Bumble, stirring his tea, and looking up into the matron's face; 'are *you* hard-hearted, Mrs. Corney?'

'Dear me!' exclaimed the matron, 'what a very curious question from a single man. What can you want to know for, Mr. Bumble?'

The beadle drank his tea to the last drop; finished a piece of toast; whisked the crumbs off his knees; wiped his lips; and deliberately kissed the matron.

'Mr. Bumble!' cried that discreet lady in a whisper; for the fright was so great, that she had quite lost her voice, 'Mr. Bumble, I shall scream!' Mr. Bumble made no reply; but in a slow and dignified manner, put his arm round the matron's waist.

As the lady had stated her intention of screaming, of course she would have screamed at this additional boldness, but that the exertion was rendered unnecessary by a hasty knocking at the door: which was no sooner

heard, than Mr. Bumble darted, with much agility, to the wine bottles, and began dusting them with great violence: while the matron sharply demanded who was there.

It is worthy of remark, as a curious physical instance of the efficacy of a sudden surprise in counteracting the effects of extreme fear, that her voice had quite recovered all its official asperity.

‘If you please, mistress,’ said a withered old female pauper, hideously ugly: putting her head in at the door, ‘Old Sally is a-going fast.’

‘Well, what’s that to me?’ angrily demanded the matron. ‘I can’t keep her alive, can I?’

‘No, no, mistress,’ replied the old woman, ‘nobody can; she’s far beyond the reach of help. I’ve seen a many people die; little babes and great strong men; and I know when death’s a-coming, well enough. But she’s troubled in her mind: and when the fits are not on her,—and that’s not often, for she is dying very hard,—she says she has got something to tell, which you must hear. She’ll never die quiet till you come, mistress.’

At this intelligence, the worthy Mrs. Corney muttered a variety of invectives against old women who couldn’t even die without purposely annoying their betters; and, muffling herself in a thick shawl which she hastily caught up, briefly requested Mr. Bumble to stay till she came back, lest anything particular should occur. Bidding the messenger walk fast, and not be all night hobbling up the stairs, she followed her from the room with a very ill grace, scolding all the way.

Mr. Bumble’s conduct on being left to himself, was rather inexplicable. He opened the closet, counted the teaspoons, weighed the sugar-tongs, closely inspected a silver milk-pot to ascertain that it was of the genuine metal, and, having satisfied his curiosity on these points, put on his cocked hat corner-wise, and danced with much gravity four distinct times round the table.

Having gone through this very extraordinary performance, he took off the cocked hat again, and, spreading himself before the fire with his back towards it, seemed to be mentally engaged in taking an exact inventory of the furniture.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT WAS NO UNFIT messenger of death, who had disturbed the quiet of the matron's room. Her body was bent by age; her limbs trembled with palsy; her face, distorted into a mumbling leer, resembled more the grotesque shaping of some wild pencil, than the work of Nature's hand.

Alas! How few of Nature's faces are left alone to gladden us with their beauty! The cares, and sorrows, and hungerings, of the world, change them as they change hearts; and it is only when those passions sleep, and have lost their hold for ever, that the troubled clouds pass off, and leave Heaven's surface clear. It is a common thing for the countenances of the dead, even in that fixed and rigid state, to subside into the long-forgotten expression of sleeping infancy, and settle into the very look of early life; so calm, so peaceful, do they grow again, that those who knew them in their happy childhood, kneel by the coffin's side in awe, and see the Angel even upon earth.

The old crone tottered along the passages, and up the stairs, muttering some indistinct answers to the chidings of her companion; being at length compelled to pause for breath, she gave the light into her hand, and remained behind to follow as she might: while the more nimble superior made her way to the room where the sick woman lay.

It was a bare garret-room, with a dim light burning at the farther end. There was another old woman watching by the bed; the parish apothecary's apprentice was standing by the fire, making a toothpick out of a quill.

'Cold night, Mrs. Corney,' said this young gentleman, as the matron entered.

'Very cold, indeed, sir,' replied the mistress, in her most civil tones, and dropping a curtsey as she spoke.

'You should get better coals out of your contractors,' said the

apothecary’s deputy, breaking a lump on the top of the fire with the rusty poker; ‘these are not at all the sort of thing for a cold night.’

‘They’re the board’s choosing, sir,’ returned the matron. ‘The least they could do, would be to keep us pretty warm: for our places are hard enough.’

The conversation was here interrupted by a moan from the sick woman.

‘Oh!’ said the young mag, turning his face towards the bed, as if he had previously quite forgotten the patient, ‘it’s all U.P. there, Mrs. Corney.’

‘It is, is it, sir?’ asked the matron.

‘If she lasts a couple of hours, I shall be surprised,’ said the apothecary’s apprentice, intent upon the toothpick’s point. ‘It’s a break-up of the system altogether. Is she dozing, old lady?’

The attendant stooped over the bed, to ascertain; and nodded in the affirmative.

‘Then perhaps she’ll go off in that way, if you don’t make a row,’ said the young man. ‘Put the light on the floor. She won’t see it there.’

The attendant did as she was told: shaking her head meanwhile, to intimate that the woman would not die so easily; having done so, she resumed her seat by the side of the other nurse, who had by this time returned. The mistress, with an expression of impatience, wrapped herself in her shawl, and sat at the foot of the bed.

The apothecary’s apprentice, having completed the manufacture of the toothpick, planted himself in front of the fire and made good use of it for ten minutes or so: when apparently growing rather dull, he wished Mrs. Corney joy of her job, and took himself off on tiptoe.

When they had sat in silence for some time, the two old women rose from the bed, and crouching over the fire, held out their withered hands to catch the heat. The flame threw a ghastly light on their shrivelled faces, and made their ugliness appear terrible, as, in this position, they began to converse in a low voice.

‘Did she say any more, Anny dear, while I was gone?’ inquired the messenger.

‘Not a word,’ replied the other. ‘She plucked and tore at her arms for a little time; but I held her hands, and she soon dropped off. She hasn’t much strength in her, so I easily kept her quiet. I ain’t so weak for an old woman, although I am on parish allowance; no, no!’

‘Did she drink the hot wine the doctor said she was to have?’ demanded

the first.

‘I tried to get it down,’ rejoined the other. ‘But her teeth were tight set, and she clenched the mug so hard that it was as much as I could do to get it back again. So I drank it; and it did me good!’

Looking cautiously round, to ascertain that they were not overheard, the two hags cowered nearer to the fire, and chuckled heartily.

‘I mind the time,’ said the first speaker, ‘when she would have done the same, and made rare fun of it afterwards.’

‘Ay, that she would,’ rejoined the other; ‘she had a merry heart. ‘A many, many, beautiful corpses she laid out, as nice and neat as waxwork. My old eyes have seen them—ay, and those old hands touched them too; for I have helped her, scores of times.’

Stretching forth her trembling fingers as she spoke, the old creature shook them exultingly before her face, and fumbling in her pocket, brought out an old time-discoloured tin snuff-box, from which she shook a few grains into the outstretched palm of her companion, and a few more into her own. While they were thus employed, the matron, who had been impatiently watching until the dying woman should awaken from her stupor, joined them by the fire, and sharply asked how long she was to wait?

‘Not long, mistress,’ replied the second woman, looking up into her face. ‘We have none of us long to wait for Death. Patience, patience! He’ll be here soon enough for us all.’

‘Hold your tongue, you doting idiot!’ said the matron sternly. ‘You, Martha, tell me; has she been in this way before?’

‘Often,’ answered the first woman.

‘But will never be again,’ added the second one; ‘that is, she’ll never wake again but once—and mind, mistress, that won’t be for long!’

‘Long or short,’ said the matron, snappishly, ‘she won’t find me here when she does wake; take care, both of you, how you worry me again for nothing. It’s no part of my duty to see all the old women in the house die, and I won’t—that’s more. Mind that, you impudent old harridans. If you make a fool of me again, I’ll soon cure you, I warrant you!’

She was bouncing away, when a cry from the two women, who had turned towards the bed, caused her to look round. The patient had raised herself upright, and was stretching her arms towards them.

‘Who’s that?’ she cried, in a hollow voice.

‘Hush, hush!’ said one of the women, stooping over her. ‘Lie down, lie down!’

‘I’ll never lie down again alive!’ said the woman, struggling. ‘I *will* tell her! Come here! Nearer! Let me whisper in your ear.’

She clutched the matron by the arm, and forcing her into a chair by the bedside, was about to speak, when looking round, she caught sight of the two old women bending forward in the attitude of eager listeners.

‘Turn them away,’ said the woman, drowsily; ‘make haste! make haste!’

The two old crones, chiming in together, began pouring out many piteous lamentations that the poor dear was too far gone to know her best friends; and were uttering sundry protestations that they would never leave her, when the superior pushed them from the room, closed the door, and returned to the bedside. On being excluded, the old ladies changed their tone, and cried through the keyhole that old Sally was drunk; which, indeed, was not unlikely; since, in addition to a moderate dose of opium prescribed by the apothecary, she was labouring under the effects of a final taste of gin-and-water which had been privily administered, in the openness of their hearts, by the worthy old ladies themselves.

‘Now listen to me,’ said the dying woman aloud, as if making a great effort to revive one latent spark of energy. ‘In this very room—in this very bed—I once nursed a pretty young creetur’, that was brought into the house with her feet cut and bruised with walking, and all soiled with dust and blood. She gave birth to a boy, and died. Let me think—what was the year again!’

‘Never mind the year,’ said the impatient auditor; ‘what about her?’

‘Ay,’ murmured the sick woman, relapsing into her former drowsy state, ‘what about her?—what about—I know!’ she cried, jumping fiercely up: her face flushed, and her eyes starting from her head—‘I robbed her, so I did! She wasn’t cold—I tell you she wasn’t cold, when I stole it!’

‘Stole what, for God’s sake?’ cried the matron, with a gesture as if she would call for help.

‘*It*!’ replied the woman, laying her hand over the other’s mouth. ‘The only thing she had. She wanted clothes to keep her warm, and food to eat; but she had kept it safe, and had it in her bosom. It was gold, I tell you! Rich gold, that might have saved her life!’

‘Gold!’ echoed the matron, bending eagerly over the woman as she fell back. ‘Go on, go on—yes—what of it? Who was the mother? When was it?’

‘She charge me to keep it safe,’ replied the woman with a groan, ‘and trusted me as the only woman about her. I stole it in my heart when she first showed it me hanging round her neck; and the child’s death, perhaps, is on me besides! They would have treated him better, if they had known it all!’

‘Known what?’ asked the other. ‘Speak!’

‘The boy grew so like his mother,’ said the woman, rambling on, and not heeding the question, ‘that I could never forget it when I saw his face. Poor girl! poor girl! She was so young, too! Such a gentle lamb! Wait; there’s more to tell. I have not told you all, have I?’

‘No, no,’ replied the matron, inclining her head to catch the words, as they came more faintly from the dying woman. ‘Be quick, or it may be too late!’

‘The mother,’ said the woman, making a more violent effort than before; ‘the mother, when the pains of death first came upon her, whispered in my ear that if her baby was born alive, and thrived, the day might come when it would not feel so much disgraced to hear its poor young mother named. “And oh, kind Heaven!” she said, folding her thin hands together, “whether it be boy or girl, raise up some friends for it in this troubled world, and take pity upon a lonely desolate child, abandoned to its mercy!”’

‘The boy’s name?’ demanded the matron.

‘They *called* him Oliver,’ replied the woman, feebly. ‘The gold I stole was—’

‘Yes, yes—what?’ cried the other.

She was bending eagerly over the woman to hear her reply; but drew back, instinctively, as she once again rose, slowly and stiffly, into a sitting posture; then, clutching the coverlid with both hands, muttered some indistinct sounds in her throat, and fell lifeless on the bed.

‘Stone dead!’ said one of the old women, hurrying in as soon as the door was opened.

‘And nothing to tell, after all,’ rejoined the matron, walking carelessly away.

The two crones, to all appearance, too busily occupied in the preparations for their dreadful duties to make any reply, were left alone,

hovering about the body.

CHAPTER XXV

WHILE THESE THINGS WERE passing in the country workhouse, Mr. Fagin sat in the old den—the same from which Oliver had been removed by the girl—brooding over a dull, smoky fire. He held a pair of bellows upon his knee, with which he had apparently been endeavouring to rouse it into more cheerful action; but he had fallen into deep thought; and with his arms folded on them, and his chin resting on his thumbs, fixed his eyes, abstractedly, on the rusty bars.

At a table behind him sat the Artful Dodger, Master Charles Bates, and Mr. Chitling: all intent upon a game of whist; the Artful taking dummy against Master Bates and Mr. Chitling. The countenance of the first-named gentleman, peculiarly intelligent at all times, acquired great additional interest from his close observance of the game, and his attentive perusal of Mr. Chitling's hand; upon which, from time to time, as occasion served, he bestowed a variety of earnest glances: wisely regulating his own play by the result of his observations upon his neighbour's cards. It being a cold night, the Dodger wore his hat, as, indeed, was often his custom within doors. He also sustained a clay pipe between his teeth, which he only removed for a brief space when he deemed it necessary to apply for refreshment to a quart pot upon the table, which stood ready filled with gin-and-water for the accommodation of the company.

Master Bates was also attentive to the play; but being of a more excitable nature than his accomplished friend, it was observable that he more frequently applied himself to the gin-and-water, and moreover indulged in many jests and irrelevant remarks, all highly unbecoming a scientific rubber. Indeed, the Artful, presuming upon their close attachment, more than once took occasion to reason gravely with his companion upon these improprieties; all of which remonstrances, Master Bates received in

extremely good part; merely requesting his friend to be ‘blowed,’ or to insert his head in a sack, or replying with some other neatly-turned witticism of a similar kind, the happy application of which, excited considerable admiration in the mind of Mr. Chitling. It was remarkable that the latter gentleman and his partner invariably lost; and that the circumstance, so far from angering Master Bates, appeared to afford him the highest amusement, inasmuch as he laughed most uproariously at the end of every deal, and protested that he had never seen such a jolly game in all his born days.

‘That’s two doubles and the rub,’ said Mr. Chitling, with a very long face, as he drew half-a-crown from his waistcoat-pocket. ‘I never see such a feller as you, Jack; you win everything. Even when we’ve good cards, Charley and I can’t make nothing of ’em.’

Either the master or the manner of this remark, which was made very ruefully, delighted Charley Bates so much, that his consequent shout of laughter roused the Jew from his reverie, and induced him to inquire what was the matter.

‘Matter, Fagin!’ cried Charley. ‘I wish you had watched the play. Tommy Chitling hasn’t won a point; and I went partners with him against the Artfull and dumb.’

‘Ay, ay!’ said the Jew, with a grin, which sufficiently demonstrated that he was at no loss to understand the reason. ‘Try ’em again, Tom; try ’em again.’

‘No more of it for me, thank ’ee, Fagin,’ replied Mr. Chitling; ‘I’ve had enough. That ’ere Dodger has such a run of luck that there’s no standing again’ him.’

‘Ha! ha! my dear,’ replied the Jew, ‘you must get up very early in the morning, to win against the Dodger.’

‘Morning!’ said Charley Bates; ‘you must put your boots on over-night, and have a telescope at each eye, and a opera-glass between your shoulders, if you want to come over him.’

Mr. Dawkins received these handsome compliments with much philosophy, and offered to cut any gentleman in company, for the first picture-card, at a shilling at a time. Nobody accepting the challenge, and his pipe being by this time smoked out, he proceeded to amuse himself by sketching a ground-plan of Newgate on the table with the piece of chalk

which had served him in lieu of counters; whistling, meantime, with peculiar shrillness.

‘How precious dull you are, Tommy!’ said the Dodger, stopping short when there had been a long silence; and addressing Mr. Chitling. ‘What do you think he’s thinking of, Fagin?’

‘How should I know, my dear?’ replied the Jew, looking round as he plied the bellows. ‘About his losses, maybe; or the little retirement in the country that he’s just left, eh? Ha! ha! Is that it, my dear?’

‘Not a bit of it,’ replied the Dodger, stopping the subject of discourse as Mr. Chitling was about to reply. ‘What do *you* say, Charley?’

‘*I* should say,’ replied Master Bates, with a grin, ‘that he was uncommon sweet upon Betsy. See how he’s a-blushing! Oh, my eye! here’s a merry-go-rounder! Tommy Chitling’s in love! Oh, Fagin, Fagin! what a spree!’

Thoroughly overpowered with the notion of Mr. Chitling being the victim of the tender passion, Master Bates threw himself back in his chair with such violence, that he lost his balance, and pitched over upon the floor; where (the accident abating nothing of his merriment) he lay at full length until his laugh was over, when he resumed his former position, and began another laugh.

‘Never mind him, my dear,’ said the Jew, winking at Mr. Dawkins, and giving Master Bates a reproving tap with the nozzle of the bellows. ‘Betsy’s a fine girl. Stick up to her, Tom. Stick up to her.’

‘What I mean to say, Fagin,’ replied Mr. Chitling, very red in the face, ‘is, that that isn’t anything to anybody here.’

‘No more it is,’ replied the Jew; ‘Charley will talk. Don’t mind him, my dear; don’t mind him. Betsy’s a fine girl. Do as she bids you, Tom, and you will make your fortune.’

‘So I *do* do as she bids me,’ replied Mr. Chitling; ‘I shouldn’t have been milled, if it hadn’t been for her advice. But it turned out a good job for you; didn’t it, Fagin! And what’s six weeks of it? It must come, some time or another, and why not in the winter time when you don’t want to go out a-walking so much; eh, Fagin?’

‘Ah, to be sure, my dear,’ replied the Jew.

‘You wouldn’t mind it again, Tom, would you,’ asked the Dodger, winking upon Charley and the Jew, ‘if Bet was all right?’

‘I mean to say that I shouldn’t,’ replied Tom, angrily. ‘There, now. Ah!

Who’ll say as much as that, I should like to know; eh, Fagin?’

‘Nobody, my dear,’ replied the Jew; ‘not a soul, Tom. I don’t know one of ’em that would do it besides you; not one of ’em, my dear.’

‘I might have got clear off, if I’d split upon her; mightn’t I, Fagin?’ angrily pursued the poor half-witted dupe. ‘A word from me would have done it; wouldn’t it, Fagin?’

‘To be sure it would, my dear,’ replied the Jew.

‘But I didn’t blab it; did I, Fagin?’ demanded Tom, pouring question upon question with great volubility.

‘No, no, to be sure,’ replied the Jew; ‘you were too stout-hearted for that. A deal too stout, my dear!’

‘Perhaps I was,’ rejoined Tom, looking round; ‘and if I was, what’s to laugh at, in that; eh, Fagin?’

The Jew, perceiving that Mr. Chitling was considerably roused, hastened to assure him that nobody was laughing; and to prove the gravity of the company, appealed to Master Bates, the principal offender. But, unfortunately, Charley, in opening his mouth to reply that he was never more serious in his life, was unable to prevent the escape of such a violent roar, that the abused Mr. Chitling, without any preliminary ceremonies, rushed across the room and aimed a blow at the offender; who, being skilful in evading pursuit, ducked to avoid it, and chose his time so well that it lighted on the chest of the merry old gentleman, and caused him to stagger to the wall, where he stood panting for breath, while Mr. Chitling looked on in intense dismay.

‘Hark!’ cried the Dodger at this moment, ‘I heard the tinkler.’ Catching up the light, he crept softly upstairs.

The bell was rung again, with some impatience, while the party were in darkness. After a short pause, the Dodger reappeared, and whispered Fagin mysteriously.

‘What!’ cried the Jew, ‘alone?’

The Dodger nodded in the affirmative, and, shading the flame of the candle with his hand, gave Charley Bates a private intimation, in dumb show, that he had better not be funny just then. Having performed this friendly office, he fixed his eyes on the Jew’s face, and awaited his directions.

The old man bit his yellow fingers, and meditated for some seconds; his

face working with agitation the while, as if he dreaded something, and feared to know the worst. At length he raised his head.

‘Where is he?’ he asked.

The Dodger pointed to the floor above, and made a gesture, as if to leave the room.

‘Yes,’ said the Jew, answering the mute inquiry; ‘bring him down. Hush! Quiet, Charley! Gently, Tom! Scarce, scarce!’

This brief direction to Charley Bates, and his recent antagonist, was softly and immediately obeyed. There was no sound of their whereabout, when the Dodger descended the stairs, bearing the light in his hand, and followed by a man in a coarse smock-frock; who, after casting a hurried glance round the room, pulled off a large wrapper which had concealed the lower portion of his face, and disclosed: all haggard, unwashed, and unshorn: the features of flash Toby Crackit.

‘How are you, Faguey?’ said this worthy, nodding to the Jew. ‘Pop that shawl away in my castor, Dodger, so that I may know where to find it when I cut; that’s the time of day! You’ll be a fine young cracksman afore the old file now.’

With these words he pulled up the smock-frock; and, winding it round his middle, drew a chair to the fire, and placed his feet upon the hob.

‘See there, Faguey,’ he said, pointing disconsolately to his top boots; ‘not a drop of Day and Martin since you know when; not a bubble of blacking, by Jove! But don’t look at me in that way, man. All in good time. I can’t talk about business till I’ve eat and drank; so produce the sustainance, and let’s have a quiet fill-out for the first time these three days!’

The Jew motioned to the Dodger to place what eatables there were, upon the table; and, seating himself opposite the housebreaker, waited his leisure.

To judge from appearances, Toby was by no means in a hurry to open the conversation. At first, the Jew contented himself with patiently watching his countenance, as if to gain from its expression some clue to the intelligence he brought; but in vain.

He looked tired and worn, but there was the same complacent repose upon his features that they always wore: and through dirt, and beard, and whisker, there still shone, unimpaired, the self-satisfied smirk of flash Toby Crackit. Then the Jew, in an agony of impatience, watched every morsel he

put into his mouth; pacing up and down the room, meanwhile, in irrepressible excitement. It was all of no use. Toby continued to eat with the utmost outward indifference, until he could eat no more; then, ordering the Dodger out, he closed the door, mixed a glass of spirits and water, and composed himself for talking.

‘First and foremost, Faguey,’ said Toby.

‘Yes, yes!’ interposed the Jew, drawing up his chair.

Mr. Crackit stopped to take a draught of spirits and water, and to declare that the gin was excellent; then placing his feet against the low mantelpiece, so as to bring his boots to about the level of his eye, he quietly resumed.

‘First and foremost, Faguey,’ said the housebreaker, ‘how’s Bill?’

‘What!’ screamed the Jew, starting from his seat.

‘Why, you don’t mean to say—’ began Toby, turning pale.

‘Mean!’ cried the Jew, stamping furiously on the ground. ‘Where are they? Sikes and the boy! Where are they? Where have they been? Where are they hiding? Why have they not been here?’

‘The crack failed,’ said Toby faintly.

‘I know it,’ replied the Jew, tearing a newspaper from his pocket and pointing to it. ‘What more?’

‘They fired and hit the boy. We cut over the fields at the back, with him between us—straight as the crow flies—through hedge and ditch. They gave chase. Damme! the whole country was awake, and the dogs upon us.’

‘The boy!’

‘Bill had him on his back, and scudded like the wind. We stopped to take him between us; his head hung down, and he was cold. They were close upon our heels; every man for himself, and each from the gallows! We parted company, and left the youngster lying in a ditch. Alive or dead, that’s all I know about him.’

The Jew stopped to hear no more; but uttering a loud yell, and twining his hands in his hair, rushed from the room, and from the house.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE OLD MAN HAD gained the street corner, before he began to recover the effect of Toby Crackit's intelligence. He had relaxed nothing of his unusual speed; but was still pressing onward, in the same wild and disordered manner, when the sudden dashing past of a carriage: and a boisterous cry from the foot passengers, who saw his danger: drove him back upon the pavement. Avoiding, as much as was possible, all the main streets, and skulking only through the by-ways and alleys, he at length emerged on Snow Hill. Here he walked even faster than before; nor did he linger until he had again turned into a court; when, as if conscious that he was now in his proper element, he fell into his usual shuffling pace, and seemed to breathe more freely.

Near to the spot on which Snow Hill and Holborn Hill meet, opens, upon the right hand as you come out of the City, a narrow and dismal alley, leading to Saffron Hill. In its filthy shops are exposed for sale huge bunches of second-hand silk handkerchiefs, of all sizes and patterns; for here reside the traders who purchase them from pick-pockets. Hundreds of these handkerchiefs hang dangling from pegs outside the windows or flaunting from the door-posts; and the shelves, within, are piled with them. Confined as the limits of Field Lane are, it has its barber, its coffee-shop, its beer-shop, and its fried-fish warehouse. It is a commercial colony of itself: the emporium of petty larceny: visited at early morning, and setting-in of dusk, by silent merchants, who traffic in dark back-parlours, and who go as strangely as they come. Here, the clothesman, the shoe-vamper, and the rag-merchant, display their goods, as sign-boards to the petty thief; here, stores of old iron and bones, and heaps of mildewy fragments of woollen-stuff and linen, rust and rot in the grimy cellars.

It was into this place that the Jew turned. He was well known to the

sallow denizens of the lane; for such of them as were on the look-out to buy or sell, nodded, familiarly, as he passed along. He replied to their salutations in the same way; but bestowed no closer recognition until he reached the further end of the alley; when he stopped, to address a salesman of small stature, who had squeezed as much of his person into a child's chair as the chair would hold, and was smoking a pipe at his warehouse door.

'Why, the sight of you, Mr. Fagin, would cure the hoptalmy!' said this respectable trader, in acknowledgment of the Jew's inquiry after his health.

'The neighbourhood was a little too hot, Lively,' said Fagin, elevating his eyebrows, and crossing his hands upon his shoulders.

'Well, I've heerd that complaint of it, once or twice before,' replied the trader; 'but it soon cools down again; don't you find it so?'

Fagin nodded in the affirmative. Pointing in the direction of Saffron Hill, he inquired whether any one was up yonder to-night.

'At the Cripples?' inquired the man.

The Jew nodded.

'Let me see,' pursued the merchant, reflecting.

'Yes, there's some half-dozen of 'em gone in, that I knows. I don't think your friend's there.'

'Sikes is not, I suppose?' inquired the Jew, with a disappointed countenance.

'*Non istwentus*, as the lawyers say,' replied the little man, shaking his head, and looking amazingly sly. 'Have you got anything in my line to-night?'

'Nothing to-night,' said the Jew, turning away.

'Are you going up to the Cripples, Fagin?' cried the little man, calling after him. 'Stop! I don't mind if I have a drop there with you!'

But as the Jew, looking back, waved his hand to intimate that he preferred being alone; and, moreover, as the little man could not very easily disengage himself from the chair; the sign of the Cripples was, for a time, bereft of the advantage of Mr. Lively's presence. By the time he had got upon his legs, the Jew had disappeared; so Mr. Lively, after ineffectually standing on tiptoe, in the hope of catching sight of him, again forced himself into the little chair, and, exchanging a shake of the head with a lady in the opposite shop, in which doubt and mistrust were plainly mingled,

resumed his pipe with a grave demeanour.

The Three Cripples, or rather the Cripples; which was the sign by which the establishment was familiarly known to its patrons: was the public-house in which Mr. Sikes and his dog have already figured. Merely making a sign to a man at the bar, Fagin walked straight upstairs, and opening the door of a room, and softly insinuating himself into the chamber, looked anxiously about: shading his eyes with his hand, as if in search of some particular person.

The room was illuminated by two gas-lights; the glare of which was prevented by the barred shutters, and closely-drawn curtains of faded red, from being visible outside. The ceiling was blackened, to prevent its colour from being injured by the flaring of the lamps; and the place was so full of dense tobacco smoke, that at first it was scarcely possible to discern anything more. By degrees, however, as some of it cleared away through the open door, an assemblage of heads, as confused as the noises that greeted the ear, might be made out; and as the eye grew more accustomed to the scene, the spectator gradually became aware of the presence of a numerous company, male and female, crowded round a long table: at the upper end of which, sat a chairman with a hammer of office in his hand; while a professional gentleman with a bluish nose, and his face tied up for the benefit of a toothache, presided at a jingling piano in a remote corner.

As Fagin stepped softly in, the professional gentleman, running over the keys by way of prelude, occasioned a general cry of order for a song; which having subsided, a young lady proceeded to entertain the company with a ballad in four verses, between each of which the accompanyist played the melody all through, as loud as he could. When this was over, the chairman gave a sentiment, after which, the professional gentleman on the chairman’s right and left volunteered a duet, and sang it, with great applause.

It was curious to observe some faces which stood out prominently from among the group. There was the chairman himself, (the landlord of the house,) a coarse, rough, heavy built fellow, who, while the songs were proceeding, rolled his eyes hither and thither, and, seeming to give himself up to joviality, had an eye for everything that was done, and an ear for everything that was said—and sharp ones, too. Near him were the singers: receiving, with professional indifference, the compliments of the company, and applying themselves, in turn, to a dozen proffered glasses of spirits and

water, tendered by their more boisterous admirers; whose countenances, expressive of almost every vice in almost every grade, irresistibly attracted the attention, by their very repulsiveness. Cunning, ferocity, and drunkeness in all its stages, were there, in their strongest aspect; and women: some with the last lingering tinge of their early freshness almost fading as you looked: others with every mark and stamp of their sex utterly beaten out, and presenting but one loathsome blank of profligacy and crime; some mere girls, others but young women, and none past the prime of life; formed the darkest and saddest portion of this dreary picture.

Fagin, troubled by no grave emotions, looked eagerly from face to face while these proceedings were in progress; but apparently without meeting that of which he was in search. Succeeding, at length, in catching the eye of the man who occupied the chair, he beckoned to him slightly, and left the room, as quietly as he had entered it.

'What can I do for you, Mr. Fagin?' inquired the man, as he followed him out to the landing. 'Won't you join us? They'll be delighted, every one of 'em.'

The Jew shook his head impatiently, and said in a whisper, 'Is *he* here?'

'No,' replied the man.

'And no news of Barney?' inquired Fagin.

'None,' replied the landlord of the Cripples; for it was he. 'He won't stir till it's all safe. Depend on it, they're on the scent down there; and that if he moved, he'd blow upon the thing at once. He's all right enough, Barney is, else I should have heard of him. I'll pound it, that Barney's managing properly. Let him alone for that.'

'Will *he* be here to-night?' asked the Jew, laying the same emphasis on the pronoun as before.

'Monks, do you mean?' inquired the landlord, hesitating.

'Hush!' said the Jew. 'Yes.'

'Certain,' replied the man, drawing a gold watch from his fob; 'I expected him here before now. If you'll wait ten minutes, he'll be—'

'No, no,' said the Jew, hastily; as though, however desirous he might be to see the person in question, he was nevertheless relieved by his absence. 'Tell him I came here to see him; and that he must come to me to-night. No, say to-morrow. As he is not here, to-morrow will be time enough.'

'Good!' said the man. 'Nothing more?'

‘Not a word now,’ said the Jew, descending the stairs.

‘I say,’ said the other, looking over the rails, and speaking in a hoarse whisper; ‘what a time this would be for a sell! I’ve got Phil Barker here: so drunk, that a boy might take him!’

‘Ah! But it’s not Phil Barker’s time,’ said the Jew, looking up.

‘Phil has something more to do, before we can afford to part with him; so go back to the company, my dear, and tell them to lead merry lives—*while they last*. Ha! ha! ha!’

The landlord reciprocated the old man’s laugh; and returned to his guests. The Jew was no sooner alone, than his countenance resumed its former expression of anxiety and thought. After a brief reflection, he called a hack-cabriolet, and bade the man drive towards Bethnal Green. He dismissed him within some quarter of a mile of Mr. Sikes’s residence, and performed the short remainder of the distance, on foot.

‘Now,’ muttered the Jew, as he knocked at the door, ‘if there is any deep play here, I shall have it out of you, my girl, cunning as you are.’

She was in her room, the woman said. Fagin crept softly upstairs, and entered it without any previous ceremony. The girl was alone; lying with her head upon the table, and her hair straggling over it.

‘She has been drinking,’ thought the Jew, cooly, ‘or perhaps she is only miserable.’

The old man turned to close the door, as he made this reflection; the noise thus occasioned, roused the girl. She eyed his crafty face narrowly, as she inquired to his recital of Toby Crackit’s story. When it was concluded, she sank into her former attitude, but spoke not a word. She pushed the candle impatiently away; and once or twice as she feverishly changed her position, shuffled her feet upon the ground; but this was all.

During the silence, the Jew looked restlessly about the room, as if to assure himself that there were no appearances of Sikes having covertly returned. Apparently satisfied with his inspection, he coughed twice or thrice, and made as many efforts to open a conversation; but the girl heeded him no more than if he had been made of stone. At length he made another attempt; and rubbing his hands together, said, in his most conciliatory tone,

‘And where should you think Bill was now, my dear?’

The girl moaned out some half intelligible reply, that she could not tell; and seemed, from the smothered noise that escaped her, to be crying.

‘And the boy, too,’ said the Jew, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of her face. ‘Poor leetle child! Left in a ditch, Nance; only think!’

‘The child,’ said the girl, suddenly looking up, ‘is better where he is, than among us; and if no harm comes to Bill from it, I hope he lies dead in the ditch and that his young bones may rot there.’

‘What!’ cried the Jew, in amazement.

‘Ay, I do,’ returned the girl, meeting his gaze. ‘I shall be glad to have him away from my eyes, and to know that the worst is over. I can’t bear to have him about me. The sight of him turns me against myself, and all of you.’

‘Pooh!’ said the Jew, scornfully. ‘You’re drunk.’

‘Am I?’ cried the girl bitterly. ‘It’s no fault of yours, if I am not! You’d never have me anything else, if you had your will, except now;—the humour doesn’t suit you, doesn’t it?’

‘No!’ rejoined the Jew, furiously. ‘It does not.’

‘Change it, then!’ responded the girl, with a laugh.

‘Change it!’ exclaimed the Jew, exasperated beyond all bounds by his companion’s unexpected obstinacy, and the vexation of the night, ‘I *will* change it! Listen to me, you drab. Listen to me, who with six words, can strangle Sikes as surely as if I had his bull’s throat between my fingers now. If he comes back, and leaves the boy behind him; if he gets off free, and dead or alive, fails to restore him to me; murder him yourself if you would have him escape Jack Ketch. And do it the moment he sets foot in this room, or mind me, it will be too late!’

‘What is all this?’ cried the girl involuntarily.

‘What is it?’ pursued Fagin, mad with rage. ‘When the boy’s worth hundreds of pounds to me, am I to lose what chance threw me in the way of getting safely, through the whims of a drunken gang that I could whistle away the lives of! And me bound, too, to a born devil that only wants the will, and has the power to, to—’

Panting for breath, the old man stammered for a word; and in that instant checked the torrent of his wrath, and changed his whole demeanour. A moment before, his clenched hands had grasped the air; his eyes had dilated; and his face grown livid with passion; but now, he shrunk into a chair, and, cowering together, trembled with the apprehension of having himself disclosed some hidden villainy. After a short silence, he ventured to

look round at his companion. He appeared somewhat reassured, on beholding her in the same listless attitude from which he had first roused her.

‘Nancy, dear!’ croaked the Jew, in his usual voice. ‘Did you mind me, dear?’

‘Don’t worry me now, Fagin!’ replied the girl, raising her head languidly. ‘If Bill has not done it this time, he will another. He has done many a good job for you, and will do many more when he can; and when he can’t he won’t; so no more about that.’

‘Regarding this boy, my dear?’ said the Jew, rubbing the palms of his hands nervously together.

‘The boy must take his chance with the rest,’ interrupted Nancy, hastily; ‘and I say again, I hope he is dead, and out of harm’s way, and out of yours, —that is, if Bill comes to no harm. And if Toby got clear off, Bill’s pretty sure to be safe; for Bill’s worth two of Toby any time.’

‘And about what I was saying, my dear?’ observed the Jew, keeping his glistening eye steadily upon her.

‘Your must say it all over again, if it’s anything you want me to do,’ rejoined Nancy; ‘and if it is, you had better wait till to-morrow. You put me up for a minute; but now I’m stupid again.’

Fagin put several other questions: all with the same drift of ascertaining whether the girl had profited by his unguarded hints; but, she answered them so readily, and was withal so utterly unmoved by his searching looks, that his original impression of her being more than a trifle in liquor, was confirmed. Nancy, indeed, was not exempt from a failing which was very common among the Jew’s female pupils; and in which, in their tenderer years, they were rather encouraged than checked. Her disordered appearance, and a wholesale perfume of Geneva which pervaded the apartment, afforded strong confirmatory evidence of the justice of the Jew’s supposition; and when, after indulging in the temporary display of violence above described, she subsided, first into dullness, and afterwards into a compound of feelings: under the influence of which she shed tears one minute, and in the next gave utterance to various exclamations of ‘Never say die!’ and divers calculations as to what might be the amount of the odds so long as a lady or gentleman was happy, Mr. Fagin, who had had considerable experience of such matters in his time, saw, with great

satisfaction, that she was very far gone indeed.

Having eased his mind by this discovery; and having accomplished his twofold object of imparting to the girl what he had, that night, heard, and of ascertaining, with his own eyes, that Sikes had not returned, Mr. Fagin again turned his face homeward: leaving his young friend asleep, with her head upon the table.

It was within an hour of midnight. The weather being dark, and piercing cold, he had no great temptation to loiter. The sharp wind that scoured the streets, seemed to have cleared them of passengers, as of dust and mud, for few people were abroad, and they were to all appearance hastening fast home. It blew from the right quarter for the Jew, however, and straight before it he went: trembling, and shivering, as every fresh gust drove him rudely on his way.

He had reached the corner of his own street, and was already fumbling in his pocket for the door-key, when a dark figure emerged from a projecting entrance which lay in deep shadow, and, crossing the road, glided up to him unperceived.

‘Fagin!’ whispered a voice close to his ear.

‘Ah!’ said the Jew, turning quickly round, ‘is that—’

‘Yes!’ interrupted the stranger. ‘I have been lingering here these two hours. Where the devil have you been?’

‘On your business, my dear,’ replied the Jew, glancing uneasily at his companion, and slackening his pace as he spoke. ‘On your business all night.’

‘Oh, of course!’ said the stranger, with a sneer. ‘Well; and what’s come of it?’

‘Nothing good,’ said the Jew.

‘Nothing bad, I hope?’ said the stranger, stopping short, and turning a startled look on his companion.

The Jew shook his head, and was about to reply, when the stranger, interrupting him, motioned to the house, before which they had by this time arrived: remarking, that he had better say what he had got to say, under cover: for his blood was chilled with standing about so long, and the wind blew through him.

Fagin looked as if he could have willingly excused himself from taking home a visitor at that unseasonable hour; and, indeed, muttered something

about having no fire; but his companion repeating his request in a peremptory manner, he unlocked the door, and requested him to close it softly, while he got a light.

‘It’s as dark as the grave,’ said the man, groping forward a few steps. ‘Make haste!’

‘Shut the door,’ whispered Fagin from the end of the passage. As he spoke, it closed with a loud noise.

‘That wasn’t my doing,’ said the other man, feeling his way. ‘The wind blew it to, or it shut of its own accord: one or the other. Look sharp with the light, or I shall knock my brains out against something in this confounded hole.’

Fagin stealthily descended the kitchen stairs. After a short absence, he returned with a lighted candle, and the intelligence that Toby Crackit was asleep in the back room below, and that the boys were in the front one. Beckoning the man to follow him, he led the way upstairs.

‘We can say the few words we’ve got to say in here, my dear,’ said the Jew, throwing open a door on the first floor; ‘and as there are holes in the shutters, and we never show lights to our neighbours, we’ll set the candle on the stairs. There!’

With those words, the Jew, stooping down, placed the candle on an upper flight of stairs, exactly opposite to the room door. This done, he led the way into the apartment; which was destitute of all movables save a broken arm-chair, and an old couch or sofa without covering, which stood behind the door. Upon this piece of furniture, the stranger sat himself with the air of a weary man; and the Jew, drawing up the arm-chair opposite, they sat face to face. It was not quite dark; the door was partially open; and the candle outside, threw a feeble reflection on the opposite wall.

They conversed for some time in whispers. Though nothing of the conversation was distinguishable beyond a few disjointed words here and there, a listener might easily have perceived that Fagin appeared to be defending himself against some remarks of the stranger; and that the latter was in a state of considerable irritation. They might have been talking, thus, for a quarter of an hour or more, when Monks—by which name the Jew had designated the strange man several times in the course of their colloquy—said, raising his voice a little,

‘I tell you again, it was badly planned. Why not have kept him here

among the rest, and made a sneaking, snivelling pickpocket of him at once?'

'Only hear him!' exclaimed the Jew, shrugging his shoulders.

'Why, do you mean to say you couldn't have done it, if you had chosen?' demanded Monks, sternly. 'Haven't you done it, with other boys, scores of times? If you had had patience for a twelvemonth, at most, couldn't you have got him convicted, and sent safely out of the kingdom; perhaps for life?'

'Whose turn would that have served, my dear?' inquired the Jew humbly.

'Mine,' replied Monks.

'But not mine,' said the Jew, submissively. 'He might have become of use to me. When there are two parties to a bargain, it is only reasonable that the interests of both should be consulted; is it, my good friend?'

'What then?' demanded Monks.

'I saw it was not easy to train him to the business,' replied the Jew; 'he was not like other boys in the same circumstances.'

'Curse him, no!' muttered the man, 'or he would have been a thief, long ago.'

'I had no hold upon him to make him worse,' pursued the Jew, anxiously watching the countenance of his companion. 'His hand was not in. I had nothing to frighten him with; which we always must have in the beginning, or we labour in vain. What could I do? Send him out with the Dodger and Charley? We had enough of that, at first, my dear; I trembled for us all.'

'*That* was not my doing,' observed Monks.

'No, no, my dear!' renewed the Jew. 'And I don't quarrel with it now; because, if it had never happened, you might never have clapped eyes on the boy to notice him, and so led to the discovery that it was him you were looking for. Well! I got him back for you by means of the girl; and then *she* begins to favour him.'

'Throttle the girl!' said Monks, impatiently.

'Why, we can't afford to do that just now, my dear,' replied the Jew, smiling; 'and, besides, that sort of thing is not in our way; or, one of these days, I might be glad to have it done. I know what these girls are, Monks, well. As soon as the boy begins to harden, she'll care no more for him, than for a block of wood. You want him made a thief. If he is alive, I can make

him one from this time; and, if—if—’ said the Jew, drawing nearer to the other,—‘it’s not likely, mind,—but if the worst comes to the worst, and he is dead—’

‘It’s no fault of mine if he is!’ interposed the other man, with a look of terror, and clasping the Jew’s arm with trembling hands. ‘Mind that. Fagin! I had no hand in it. Anything but his death, I told you from the first. I won’t shed blood; it’s always found out, and haunts a man besides. If they shot him dead, I was not the cause; do you hear me? Fire this infernal den! What’s that?’

‘What!’ cried the Jew, grasping the coward round the body, with both arms, as he sprung to his feet. ‘Where?’

‘Yonder! replied the man, glaring at the opposite wall. ‘The shadow! I saw the shadow of a woman, in a cloak and bonnet, pass along the wainscot like a breath!’

The Jew released his hold, and they rushed tumultuously from the room. The candle, wasted by the draught, was standing where it had been placed. It showed them only the empty staircase, and their own white faces. They listened intently: a profound silence reigned throughout the house.

‘It’s your fancy,’ said the Jew, taking up the light and turning to his companion.

‘I’ll swear I saw it!’ replied Monks, trembling. ‘It was bending forward when I saw it first; and when I spoke, it darted away.’

The Jew glanced contemptuously at the pale face of his associate, and, telling him he could follow, if he pleased, ascended the stairs. They looked into all the rooms; they were cold, bare, and empty. They descended into the passage, and thence into the cellars below. The green damp hung upon the low walls; the tracks of the snail and slug glistened in the light of the candle; but all was still as death.

‘What do you think now?’ said the Jew, when they had regained the passage. ‘Besides ourselves, there’s not a creature in the house except Toby and the boys; and they’re safe enough. See here!’

As a proof of the fact, the Jew drew forth two keys from his pocket; and explained, that when he first went downstairs, he had locked them in, to prevent any intrusion on the conference.

This accumulated testimony effectually staggered Mr. Monks. His protestations had gradually become less and less vehement as they

proceeded in their search without making any discovery; and, now, he gave vent to several very grim laughs, and confessed it could only have been his excited imagination. He declined any renewal of the conversation, however, for that night: suddenly remembering that it was past one o’clock. And so the amiable couple parted.

CHAPTER XXVII

AS IT WOULD BE, by no means, seemly in a humble author to keep so mighty a personage as a beadle waiting, with his back to the fire, and the skirts of his coat gathered up under his arms, until such time as it might suit his pleasure to relieve him; and as it would still less become his station, or his gallantry to involve in the same neglect a lady on whom that beadle had looked with an eye of tenderness and affection, and in whose ear he had whispered sweet words, which, coming from such a quarter, might well thrill the bosom of maid or matron of whatsoever degree; the historian whose pen traces these words—trusting that he knows his place, and that he entertains a becoming reverence for those upon earth to whom high and important authority is delegated—hastens to pay them that respect which their position demands, and to treat them with all that duteous ceremony which their exalted rank, and (by consequence) great virtues, imperatively claim at his hands. Towards this end, indeed, he had purposed to introduce, in this place, a dissertation touching the divine right of beadles, and elucidative of the position, that a beadle can do no wrong: which could not fail to have been both pleasurable and profitable to the right-minded reader but which he is unfortunately compelled, by want of time and space, to postpone to some more convenient and fitting opportunity; on the arrival of which, he will be prepared to show, that a beadle properly constituted: that is to say, a parochial beadle, attached to a parochial workhouse, and attending in his official capacity the parochial church: is, in right and virtue of his office, possessed of all the excellences and best qualities of humanity; and that to none of those excellences, can mere companies' beadles, or court-of-law beadles, or even chapel-of-ease beadles (save the last, and they in a very lowly and inferior degree), lay the remotest sustainable claim.

Mr. Bumble had re-counted the teaspoons, re-weighed the sugar-tongs,

made a closer inspection of the milk-pot, and ascertained to a nicety the exact condition of the furniture, down to the very horse-hair seats of the chairs; and had repeated each process full half a dozen times; before he began to think that it was time for Mrs. Corney to return. Thinking begets thinking; as there were no sounds of Mrs. Corney's approach, it occured to Mr. Bumble that it would be an innocent and virtuous way of spending the time, if he were further to allay his curiousity by a cursory glance at the interior of Mrs. Corney's chest of drawers.

Having listened at the keyhole, to assure himself that nobody was approaching the chamber, Mr. Bumble, beginning at the bottom, proceeded to make himself acquainted with the contents of the three long drawers: which, being filled with various garments of good fashion and texture, carefully preserved between two layers of old newspapers, speckled with dried lavender: seemed to yield him exceeding satisfaction. Arriving, in course of time, at the right-hand corner drawer (in which was the key), and beholding therein a small padlocked box, which, being shaken, gave forth a pleasant sound, as of the chinking of coin, Mr. Bumble returned with a stately walk to the fireplace; and, resuming his old attitude, said, with a grave and determined air, 'I'll do it!' He followed up this remarkable declaration, by shaking his head in a waggish manner for ten minutes, as though he were remonstrating with himself for being such a pleasant dog; and then, he took a view of his legs in profile, with much seeming pleasure and interest.

He was still placidly engaged in this latter survey, when Mrs. Corney, hurrying into the room, threw herself, in a breathless state, on a chair by the fireside, and covering her eyes with one hand, placed the other over her heart, and gasped for breath.

'Mrs. Corney,' said Mr. Bumble, stooping over the matron, 'what is this, ma'am? Has anything happened, ma'am? Pray answer me: I'm on—on—' Mr. Bumble, in his alarm, could not immediately think of the word 'tenterhooks,' so he said 'broken bottles.'

'Oh, Mr. Bumble!' cried the lady, 'I have been so dreadfully put out!'

'Put out, ma'am!' exclaimed Mr. Bumble; 'who has dared to—? I know!' said Mr. Bumble, checking himself, with native majesty, 'this is them wicious paupers!'

'It's dreadful to think of!' said the lady, shuddering.

‘Then *don’t* think of it, ma’am,’ rejoined Mr. Bumble.

‘I can’t help it,’ whimpered the lady.

‘Then take something, ma’am,’ said Mr. Bumble soothingly. ‘A little of the wine?’

‘Not for the world!’ replied Mrs. Corney. ‘I couldn’t,—oh! The top shelf in the right-hand corner—oh!’ Uttering these words, the good lady pointed, distractedly, to the cupboard, and underwent a convulsion from internal spasms. Mr. Bumble rushed to the closet; and, snatching a pint green-glass bottle from the shelf thus incoherently indicated, filled a tea-cup with its contents, and held it to the lady’s lips.

‘I’m better now,’ said Mrs. Corney, falling back, after drinking half of it.

Mr. Bumble raised his eyes piously to the ceiling in thankfulness; and, bringing them down again to the brim of the cup, lifted it to his nose.

‘Peppermint,’ exclaimed Mrs. Corney, in a faint voice, smiling gently on the beadle as she spoke. ‘Try it! There’s a little—a little something else in it.’

Mr. Bumble tasted the medicine with a doubtful look; smacked his lips; took another taste; and put the cup down empty.

‘It’s very comforting,’ said Mrs. Corney.

‘Very much so indeed, ma’am,’ said the beadle. As he spoke, he drew a chair beside the matron, and tenderly inquired what had happened to distress her.

‘Nothing,’ replied Mrs. Corney. ‘I am a foolish, excitable, weak creetur.’

‘Not weak, ma’am,’ retorted Mr. Bumble, drawing his chair a little closer. ‘Are you a weak creetur, Mrs. Corney?’

‘We are all weak creeturs,’ said Mrs. Corney, laying down a general principle.

‘So we are,’ said the beadle.

Nothing was said on either side, for a minute or two afterwards. By the expiration of that time, Mr. Bumble had illustrated the position by removing his left arm from the back of Mrs. Corney’s chair, where it had previously rested, to Mrs. Corney’s apron-string, round which it gradually became entwined.

‘We are all weak creeturs,’ said Mr. Bumble.

Mrs. Corney sighed.

‘Don’t sigh, Mrs. Corney,’ said Mr. Bumble.

‘I can’t help it,’ said Mrs. Corney. And she sighed again.

‘This is a very comfortable room, ma’am,’ said Mr. Bumble looking round. ‘Another room, and this, ma’am, would be a complete thing.’

‘It would be too much for one,’ murmured the lady.

‘But not for two, ma’am,’ rejoined Mr. Bumble, in soft accents. ‘Eh, Mrs. Corney?’

Mrs. Corney drooped her head, when the beadle said this; the beadle drooped his, to get a view of Mrs. Corney’s face. Mrs. Corney, with great propriety, turned her head away, and released her hand to get at her pocket-handkerchief; but insensibly replaced it in that of Mr. Bumble.

‘The board allows you coals, don’t they, Mrs. Corney?’ inquired the beadle, affectionately pressing her hand.

‘And candles,’ replied Mrs. Corney, slightly returning the pressure.

‘Coals, candles, and house-rent free,’ said Mr. Bumble. ‘Oh, Mrs. Corney, what an Angel you are!’

The lady was not proof against this burst of feeling. She sank into Mr. Bumble’s arms; and that gentleman in his agitation, imprinted a passionate kiss upon her chaste nose.

‘Such porochial perfection!’ exclaimed Mr. Bumble, rapturously. ‘You know that Mr. Slout is worse to-night, my fascinator?’

‘Yes,’ replied Mrs. Corney, bashfully.

‘He can’t live a week, the doctor says,’ pursued Mr. Bumble. ‘He is the master of this establishment; his death will cause a wacancy; that wacancy must be filled up. Oh, Mrs. Corney, what a prospect this opens! What a opportunity for a jining of hearts and housekeepings!’

Mrs. Corney sobbed.

‘The little word?’ said Mr. Bumble, bending over the bashful beauty. ‘The one little, little, little word, my blessed Corney?’

‘Ye—ye—yes!’ sighed out the matron.

‘One more,’ pursued the beadle; ‘compose your darling feelings for only one more. When is it to come off?’

Mrs. Corney twice essayed to speak: and twice failed. At length summoning up courage, she threw her arms around Mr. Bumble’s neck, and said, it might be as soon as ever he pleased, and that he was ‘a irresistible duck.’

Matters being thus amicably and satisfactorily arranged, the contract was

solemnly ratified in another teacupful of the peppermint mixture; which was rendered the more necessary, by the flutter and agitation of the lady's spirits. While it was being disposed of, she acquainted Mr. Bumble with the old woman's decease.

'Very good,' said that gentleman, sipping his peppermint; 'I'll call at Sowerberry's as I go home, and tell him to send to-morrow morning. Was it that as frightened you, love?'

'It wasn't anything particular, dear,' said the lady evasively.

'It must have been something, love,' urged Mr. Bumble. 'Won't you tell your own B.?'

'Not now,' rejoined the lady; 'one of these days. After we're married, dear.'

'After we're married!' exclaimed Mr. Bumble. 'It wasn't any impudence from any of them male paupers as—'

'No, no, love!' interposed the lady, hastily.

'If I thought it was,' continued Mr. Bumble; 'if I thought as any one of 'em had dared to lift his wulgar eyes to that lovely countenance—'

'They wouldn't have dared to do it, love,' responded the lady.

'They had better not!' said Mr. Bumble, clenching his fist. 'Let me see any man, porochial or extra-porochial, as would presume to do it; and I can tell him that he wouldn't do it a second time!'

Unembellished by any violence of gesticulation, this might have seemed no very high compliment to the lady's charms; but, as Mr. Bumble accompanied the threat with many warlike gestures, she was much touched with this proof of his devotion, and protested, with great admiration, that he was indeed a dove.

The dove then turned up his coat-collar, and put on his cocked hat; and, having exchanged a long and affectionate embrace with his future partner, once again braved the cold wind of the night: merely pausing, for a few minutes, in the male paupers' ward, to abuse them a little, with the view of satisfying himself that he could fill the office of workhouse-master with needful acerbity. Assured of his qualifications, Mr. Bumble left the building with a light heart, and bright visions of his future promotion: which served to occupy his mind until he reached the shop of the undertaker.

Now, Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry having gone out to tea and supper: and Noah Claypole not being at any time disposed to take upon himself a

greater amount of physical exertion than is necessary to a convenient performance of the two functions of eating and drinking, the shop was not closed, although it was past the usual hour of shutting-up. Mr. Bumble tapped with his cane on the counter several times; but, attracting no attention, and beholding a light shining through the glass-window of the little parlour at the back of the shop, he made bold to peep in and see what was going forward; and when he saw what was going forward, he was not a little surprised.

The cloth was laid for supper; the table was covered with bread and butter, plates and glasses; a porter-pot and a wine-bottle. At the upper end of the table, Mr. Noah Claypole lolled negligently in an easy-chair, with his legs thrown over one of the arms: an open clasp-knife in one hand, and a mass of buttered bread in the other. Close beside him stood Charlotte, opening oysters from a barrel: which Mr. Claypole condescended to swallow, with remarkable avidity. A more than ordinary redness in the region of the young gentleman's nose, and a kind of fixed wink in his right eye, denoted that he was in a slight degree intoxicated; these symptoms were confirmed by the intense relish with which he took his oysters, for which nothing but a strong appreciation of their cooling properties, in cases of internal fever, could have sufficiently accounted.

'Here's a delicious fat one, Noah, dear!' said Charlotte; 'try him, do; only this one.'

'What a delicious thing is a oyster!' remarked Mr. Claypole, after he had swallowed it. 'What a pity it is, a number of 'em should ever make you feel uncomfortable; isn't it, Charlotte?'

'It's quite a cruelty,' said Charlotte.

'So it is,' acquiesced Mr. Claypole. 'An't yer fond of oysters?'

'Not overmuch,' replied Charlotte. 'I like to see you eat 'em, Noah dear, better than eating 'em myself.'

'Lor!' said Noah, reflectively; 'how queer!'

'Have another,' said Charlotte. 'Here's one with such a beautiful, delicate beard!'

'I can't manage any more,' said Noah. 'I'm very sorry. Come here, Charlotte, and I'll kiss yer.'

'What!' said Mr. Bumble, bursting into the room. 'Say that again, sir.'

Charlotte uttered a scream, and hid her face in her apron. Mr. Claypole,

without making any further change in his position than suffering his legs to reach the ground, gazed at the beadle in drunken terror.

‘Say it again, you wile, owdacious fellow!’ said Mr. Bumble. ‘How dare you mention such a thing, sir? And how dare you encourage him, you insolent minx? Kiss her!’ exclaimed Mr. Bumble, in strong indignation. ‘Faugh!’

‘I didn’t mean to do it!’ said Noah, blubbering. ‘She’s always a-kissing of me, whether I like it, or not.’

‘Oh, Noah,’ cried Charlotte, reproachfully.

‘Yer are; yer know yer are!’ retorted Noah. ‘She’s always a-doin’ of it, Mr. Bumble, sir; she chucks me under the chin, please, sir; and makes all manner of love!’

‘Silence!’ cried Mr. Bumble, sternly. ‘Take yourself downstairs, ma’am. Noah, you shut up the shop; say another word till your master comes home, at your peril; and, when he does come home, tell him that Mr. Bumble said he was to send a old woman’s shell after breakfast to-morrow morning. Do you hear sir? Kissing!’ cried Mr. Bumble, holding up his hands. ‘The sin and wickedness of the lower orders in this porochial district is frightful! If Parliament don’t take their abominable courses under consideration, this country’s ruined, and the character of the peasantry gone for ever!’ With these words, the beadle strode, with a lofty and gloomy air, from the undertaker’s premises.

And now that we have accompanied him so far on his road home, and have made all necessary preparations for the old woman’s funeral, let us set on foot a few inquires after young Oliver Twist, and ascertain whether he be still lying in the ditch where Toby Crackit left him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

‘WOLVES TEAR YOUR THROATS!’ muttered Sikes, grinding his teeth. ‘I wish I was among some of you; you’d howl the hoarser for it.’

As Sikes growled forth this imprecation, with the most desperate ferocity that his desperate nature was capable of, he rested the body of the wounded boy across his bended knee; and turned his head, for an instant, to look back at his pursuers.

There was little to be made out, in the mist and darkness; but the loud shouting of men vibrated through the air, and the barking of the neighbouring dogs, roused by the sound of the alarm bell, resounded in every direction.

‘Stop, you white-livered hound!’ cried the robber, shouting after Toby Crackit, who, making the best use of his long legs, was already ahead. ‘Stop!’

The repetition of the word, brought Toby to a dead stand-still. For he was not quite satisfied that he was beyond the range of pistol-shot; and Sikes was in no mood to be played with.

‘Bear a hand with the boy,’ cried Sikes, beckoning furiously to his confederate. ‘Come back!’

Toby made a show of returning; but ventured, in a low voice, broken for want of breath, to intimate considerable reluctance as he came slowly along.

‘Quicker!’ cried Sikes, laying the boy in a dry ditch at his feet, and drawing a pistol from his pocket. ‘Don’t play booty with me.’

At this moment the noise grew louder. Sikes, again looking round, could discern that the men who had given chase were already climbing the gate of the field in which he stood; and that a couple of dogs were some paces in advance of them.

‘It’s all up, Bill!’ cried Toby; ‘drop the kid, and show ’em your heels.’

With this parting advice, Mr. Crackit, preferring the chance of being shot by his friend, to the certainty of being taken by his enemies, fairly turned tail, and darted off at full speed. Sikes clenched his teeth; took one look around; threw over the prostrate form of Oliver, the cape in which he had been hurriedly muffled; ran along the front of the hedge, as if to distract the attention of those behind, from the spot where the boy lay; paused, for a second, before another hedge which met it at right angles; and whirling his pistol high into the air, cleared it at a bound, and was gone.

‘Ho, ho, there!’ cried a tremulous voice in the rear. ‘Pincher! Neptune! Come here, come here!’

The dogs, who, in common with their masters, seemed to have no particular relish for the sport in which they were engaged, readily answered to the command. Three men, who had by this time advanced some distance into the field, stopped to take counsel together.

‘My advice, or, leastways, I should say, my *orders*, is,’ said the fattest man of the party, ‘that we ’mediately go home again.’

‘I am agreeable to anything which is agreeable to Mr. Giles,’ said a shorter man; who was by no means of a slim figure, and who was very pale in the face, and very polite: as frightened men frequently are.

‘I shouldn’t wish to appear ill-mannered, gentlemen,’ said the third, who had called the dogs back, ‘Mr. Giles ought to know.’

‘Certainly,’ replied the shorter man; ‘and whatever Mr. Giles says, it isn’t our place to contradict him. No, no, I know my sitiwation! Thank my stars, I know my sitiwation.’ To tell the truth, the little man *did* seem to know his situation, and to know perfectly well that it was by no means a desirable one; for his teeth chattered in his head as he spoke.

‘You are afraid, Brittles,’ said Mr. Giles.

‘I an’t,’ said Brittles.

‘You are,’ said Giles.

‘You’re a falsehood, Mr. Giles,’ said Brittles.

‘You’re a lie, Brittles,’ said Mr. Giles.

Now, these four retorts arose from Mr. Giles’s taunt; and Mr. Giles’s taunt had arisen from his indignation at having the responsibility of going home again, imposed upon himself under cover of a compliment. The third man brought the dispute to a close, most philosophically.

‘I’ll tell you what it is, gentlemen,’ said he, ‘we’re all afraid.’

‘Speak for yourself, sir,’ said Mr. Giles, who was the palest of the party.

‘So I do,’ replied the man. ‘It’s natural and proper to be afraid, under such circumstances. I am.’

‘So am I,’ said Brittles; ‘only there’s no call to tell a man he is, so bounceably.’

These frank admissions softened Mr. Giles, who at once owned that *he* was afraid; upon which, they all three faced about, and ran back again with the completest unanimity, until Mr. Giles (who had the shortest wind of the party, as was encumbered with a pitchfork) most handsomely insisted on stopping, to make an apology for his hastiness of speech.

‘But it’s wonderful,’ said Mr. Giles, when he had explained, ‘what a man will do, when his blood is up. I should have committed murder—I know I should—if we’d caught one of them rascals.’

As the other two were impressed with a similar presentiment; and as their blood, like his, had all gone down again; some speculation ensued upon the cause of this sudden change in their temperament.

‘I know what it was,’ said Mr. Giles; ‘it was the gate.’

‘I shouldn’t wonder if it was,’ exclaimed Brittles, catching at the idea.

‘You may depend upon it,’ said Giles, ‘that that gate stopped the flow of the excitement. I felt all mine suddenly going away, as I was climbing over it.’

By a remarkable coincidence, the other two had been visited with the same unpleasant sensation at that precise moment. It was quite obvious, therefore, that it was the gate; especially as there was no doubt regarding the time at which the change had taken place, because all three remembered that they had come in sight of the robbers at the instant of its occurance.

This dialogue was held between the two men who had surprised the burglars, and a travelling tinker who had been sleeping in an outhouse, and who had been roused, together with his two mongrel curs, to join in the pursuit. Mr. Giles acted in the double capacity of butler and steward to the old lady of the mansion; Brittles was a lad of all-work: who, having entered her service a mere child, was treated as a promising young boy still, though he was something past thirty.

Encouraging each other with such converse as this; but, keeping very close together, notwithstanding, and looking apprehensively round, whenever a fresh gust rattled through the boughs; the three men hurried

back to a tree, behind which they had left their lantern, lest its light should inform the thieves in what direction to fire. Catching up the light, they made the best of their way home, at a good round trot; and long after their dusky forms had ceased to be discernible, the light might have been seen twinkling and dancing in the distance, like some exhalation of the damp and gloomy atmosphere through which it was swiftly borne.

The air grew colder, as day came slowly on; and the mist rolled along the ground like a dense cloud of smoke. The grass was wet; the pathways, and low places, were all mire and water; the damp breath of an unwholesome wind went languidly by, with a hollow moaning. Still, Oliver lay motionless and insensible on the spot where Sikes had left him.

Morning drew on apace. The air become more sharp and piercing, as its first dull hue—the death of night, rather than the birth of day—glimmered faintly in the sky. The objects which had looked dim and terrible in the darkness, grew more and more defined, and gradually resolved into their familiar shapes. The rain came down, thick and fast, and pattered noisily among the leafless bushes. But, Oliver felt it not, as it beat against him; for he still lay stretched, helpless and unconscious, on his bed of clay.

At length, a low cry of pain broke the stillness that prevailed; and uttering it, the boy awoke. His left arm, rudely bandaged in a shawl, hung heavy and useless at his side; the bandage was saturated with blood. He was so weak, that he could scarcely raise himself into a sitting posture; when he had done so, he looked feebly round for help, and groaned with pain. Trembling in every joint, from cold and exhaustion, he made an effort to stand upright; but, shuddering from head to foot, fell prostrate on the ground.

After a short return of the stupor in which he had been so long plunged, Oliver: urged by a creeping sickness at his heart, which seemed to warn him that if he lay there, he must surely die: got upon his feet, and essayed to walk. His head was dizzy, and he staggered to and fro like a drunken man. But he kept up, nevertheless, and, with his head drooping languidly on his breast, went stumbling onward, he knew not whither.

And now, hosts of bewildering and confused ideas came crowding on his mind. He seemed to be still walking between Sikes and Crackit, who were angrily disputing—for the very words they said, sounded in his ears; and when he caught his own attention, as it were, by making some violent effort

to save himself from falling, he found that he was talking to them. Then, he was alone with Sikes, plodding on as on the previous day; and as shadowy people passed them, he felt the robber's grasp upon his wrist. Suddenly, he started back at the report of firearms; there rose into the air, loud cries and shouts; lights gleamed before his eyes; all was noise and tumult, as some unseen hand bore him hurriedly away. Through all these rapid visions, there ran an undefined, uneasy consciousness of pain, which wearied and tormented him incessantly.

Thus he staggered on, creeping, almost mechanically, between the bars of gates, or through hedge-gaps as they came in his way, until he reached a road. Here the rain began to fall so heavily, that it roused him.

He looked about, and saw that at no great distance there was a house, which perhaps he could reach. Pitying his condition, they might have compassion on him; and if they did not, it would be better, he thought, to die near human beings, than in the lonely open fields. He summoned up all his strength for one last trial, and bent his faltering steps towards it.

As he drew nearer to this house, a feeling come over him that he had seen it before. He remembered nothing of its details; but the shape and aspect of the building seemed familiar to him.

That garden wall! On the grass inside, he had fallen on his knees last night, and prayed the two men's mercy. It was the very house they had attempted to rob.

Oliver felt such fear come over him when he recognised the place, that, for the instant, he forgot the agony of his wound, and thought only of flight. Flight! He could scarcely stand: and if he were in full possession of all the best powers of his slight and youthful frame, whither could he fly? He pushed against the garden-gate; it was unlocked, and swung open on its hinges. He tottered across the lawn; climbed the steps; knocked faintly at the door; and, his whole strength failing him, sunk down against one of the pillars of the little portico.

It happened that about this time, Mr. Giles, Brittles, and the tinker, were recruiting themselves, after the fatigues and terrors of the night, with tea and sundries, in the kitchen. Not that it was Mr. Giles's habit to admit to too great familiarity the humbler servants: towards whom it was rather his wont to deport himself with a lofty affability, which, while it gratified, could not fail to remind them of his superior position in society. But, death, fires, and

burglary, make all men equals; so Mr. Giles sat with his legs stretched out before the kitchen fender, leaning his left arm on the table, while, with his right, he illustrated a circumstantial and minute account of the robbery, to which his bearers (but especially the cook and housemaid, who were of the party) listened with breathless interest.

‘It was about half-past two,’ said Mr. Giles, ‘or I wouldn’t swear that it mightn’t have been a little nearer three, when I woke up, and, turning round in my bed, as it might be so, (here Mr. Giles turned round in his chair, and pulled the corner of the table-cloth over him to imitate bed-clothes,) I fancied I heerd a noise.’

At this point of the narrative the cook turned pale, and asked the housemaid to shut the door: who asked Brittles, who asked the tinker, who pretended not to hear.

‘—Heerd a noise,’ continued Mr. Giles. ‘I says, at first, “This is illusion”; and was composing myself off to sleep, when I heerd the noise again, distinct.’

‘What sort of a noise?’ asked the cook.

‘A kind of a busting noise,’ replied Mr. Giles, looking round him.

‘More like the noise of powdering a iron bar on a nutmeg-grater,’ suggested Brittles.

‘It was, when *you* heerd it, sir,’ rejoined Mr. Giles; ‘but, at this time, it had a busting sound. I turned down the clothes’; continued Giles, rolling back the table-cloth, ‘sat up in bed; and listened.’

The cook and housemaid simultaneously ejaculated ‘Lor!’ and drew their chairs closer together.

‘I heerd it now, quite apparent,’ resumed Mr. Giles. ‘“Somebody,” I says, “is forcing of a door, or window; what’s to be done? I’ll call up that poor lad, Brittles, and save him from being murdered in his bed; or his throat,” I says, “may be cut from his right ear to his left, without his ever knowing it.”’

Here, all eyes were turned upon Brittles, who fixed his upon the speaker, and stared at him, with his mouth wide open, and his face expressive of the most unmitigated horror.

‘I tossed off the clothes,’ said Giles, throwing away the table-cloth, and looking very hard at the cook and housemaid, ‘got softly out of bed; drew on a pair of—’

‘Ladies present, Mr. Giles,’ murmured the tinker.

‘—Of *shoes*, sir,’ said Giles, turning upon him, and laying great emphasis on the word; ‘seized the loaded pistol that always goes upstairs with the plate-basket; and walked on tiptoes to his room. “Brittles,” I says, when I had woke him, “don’t be frightened!”’

‘So you did,’ observed Brittles, in a low voice.

‘“We’re dead men, I think, Brittles,” I says,’ continued Giles; ‘“but don’t be frightened.”’

‘*Was* he frightened?’ asked the cook.

‘Not a bit of it,’ replied Mr. Giles. ‘He was as firm—ah! pretty near as firm as I was.’

‘I should have died at once, I’m sure, if it had been me,’ observed the housemaid.

‘You’re a woman,’ retorted Brittles, plucking up a little.

‘Brittles is right,’ said Mr. Giles, nodding his head, approvingly; ‘from a woman, nothing else was to be expected. We, being men, took a dark lantern that was standing on Brittle’s hob, and groped our way downstairs in the pitch dark,—as it might be so.’

Mr. Giles had risen from his seat, and taken two steps with his eyes shut, to accompany his description with appropriate action, when he started violently, in common with the rest of the company, and hurried back to his chair. The cook and housemaid screamed.

‘It was a knock,’ said Mr. Giles, assuming perfect serenity. ‘Open the door, somebody.’

Nobody moved.

‘It seems a strange sort of a thing, a knock coming at such a time in the morning,’ said Mr. Giles, surveying the pale faces which surrounded him, and looking very blank himself; ‘but the door must be opened. Do you hear, somebody?’

Mr. Giles, as he spoke, looked at Brittles; but that young man, being naturally modest, probably considered himself nobody, and so held that the inquiry could not have any application to him; at all events, he tendered no reply. Mr. Giles directed an appealing glance at the tinker; but he had suddenly fallen asleep. The women were out of the question.

‘If Brittles would rather open the door, in the presence of witnesses,’ said Mr. Giles, after a short silence, ‘I am ready to make one.’

‘So am I,’ said the tinker, waking up, as suddenly as he had fallen asleep.

Brittles capitulated on these terms; and the party being somewhat re-assured by the discovery (made on throwing open the shutters) that it was now broad day, took their way upstairs; with the dogs in front. The two women, who were afraid to stay below, brought up the rear. By the advice of Mr. Giles, they all talked very loud, to warn any evil-disposed person outside, that they were strong in numbers; and by a master-stoke of policy, originating in the brain of the same ingenious gentleman, the dogs’ tails were well pinched, in the hall, to make them bark savagely.

These precautions having been taken, Mr. Giles held on fast by the tinker’s arm (to prevent his running away, as he pleasantly said), and gave the word of command to open the door. Brittles obeyed; the group, peeping timorously over each other’s shoulders, beheld no more formidable object than poor little Oliver Twist, speechless and exhausted, who raised his heavy eyes, and mutely solicited their compassion.

‘A boy!’ exclaimed Mr. Giles, valiantly, pushing the tinker into the background. ‘What’s the matter with the—eh?—Why—Brittles—look here—don’t you know?’

Brittles, who had got behind the door to open it, no sooner saw Oliver, than he uttered a loud cry. Mr. Giles, seizing the boy by one leg and one arm (fortunately not the broken limb) lugged him straight into the hall, and deposited him at full length on the floor thereof.

‘Here he is!’ bawled Giles, calling in a state of great excitement, up the staircase; ‘here’s one of the thieves, ma’am! Here’s a thief, miss! Wounded, miss! I shot him, miss; and Brittles held the light.’

‘—In a lantern, miss,’ cried Brittles, applying one hand to the side of his mouth, so that his voice might travel the better.

The two women-servants ran upstairs to carry the intelligence that Mr. Giles had captured a robber; and the tinker busied himself in endeavouring to restore Oliver, lest he should die before he could be hanged. In the midst of all this noise and commotion, there was heard a sweet female voice, which quelled it in an instant.

‘Giles!’ whispered the voice from the stair-head.

‘I’m here, miss,’ replied Mr. Giles. ‘Don’t be frightened, miss; I ain’t much injured. He didn’t make a very desperate resistance, miss! I was soon too many for him.’

‘Hush!’ replied the young lady; ‘you frighten my aunt as much as the thieves did. Is the poor creature much hurt?’

‘Wounded desperate, miss,’ replied Giles, with indescribable complacency.

‘He looks as if he was a-going, miss,’ bawled Brittles, in the same manner as before. ‘Wouldn’t you like to come and look at him, miss, in case he should?’

‘Hush, pray; there’s a good man!’ rejoined the lady. ‘Wait quietly only one instant, while I speak to aunt.’

With a footstep as soft and gentle as the voice, the speaker tripped away. She soon returned, with the direction that the wounded person was to be carried, carefully, upstairs to Mr. Giles’s room; and that Brittles was to saddle the pony and betake himself instantly to Chertsey: from which place, he was to despatch, with all speed, a constable and doctor.

‘But won’t you take one look at him, first, miss?’ asked Mr. Giles, with as much pride as if Oliver were some bird of rare plumage, that he had skilfully brought down. ‘Not one little peep, miss?’

‘Not now, for the world,’ replied the young lady. ‘Poor fellow! Oh! treat him kindly, Giles for my sake!’

The old servant looked up at the speaker, as she turned away, with a glance as proud and admiring as if she had been his own child. Then, bending over Oliver, he helped to carry him upstairs, with the care and solicitude of a woman.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN A HANDSOME ROOM: though its furniture had rather the air of old-fashioned comfort, than of modern elegance: there sat two ladies at a well-spread breakfast-table. Mr. Giles, dressed with scrupulous care in a full suit of black, was in attendance upon them. He had taken his station some half-way between the side-board and the breakfast-table; and, with his body drawn up to its full height, his head thrown back, and inclined the merest trifle on one side, his left leg advanced, and his right hand thrust into his waist-coat, while his left hung down by his side, grasping a waiter, looked like one who laboured under a very agreeable sense of his own merits and importance.

Of the two ladies, one was well advanced in years; but the high-backed oaken chair in which she sat, was not more upright than she. Dressed with the utmost nicety and precision, in a quaint mixture of by-gone costume, with some slight concessions to the prevailing taste, which rather served to point the old style pleasantly than to impair its effect, she sat, in a stately manner, with her hands folded on the table before her. Her eyes (and age had dimmed but little of their brightness) were attentively upon her young companion.

The younger lady was in the lovely bloom and spring-time of womanhood; at that age, when, if ever angels be for God’s good purposes enthroned in mortal forms, they may be, without impiety, supposed to abide in such as hers.

She was not past seventeen. Cast in so slight and exquisite a mould; so mild and gentle; so pure and beautiful; that earth seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit companions. The very intelligence that shone in her deep blue eye, and was stamped upon her noble head, seemed scarcely of her age, or of the world; and yet the changing expression of

sweetness and good humour, the thousand lights that played about the face, and left no shadow there; above all, the smile, the cheerful, happy smile, were made for Home, and fireside peace and happiness.

She was busily engaged in the little offices of the table. Chancing to raise her eyes as the elder lady was regarding her, she playfully put back her hair, which was simply braided on her forehead; and threw into her beaming look, such an expression of affection and artless loveliness, that blessed spirits might have smiled to look upon her.

‘And Brittles has been gone upwards of an hour, has he?’ asked the old lady, after a pause.

‘An hour and twelve minutes, ma’am,’ replied Mr. Giles, referring to a silver watch, which he drew forth by a black ribbon.

‘He is always slow,’ remarked the old lady.

‘Brittles always was a slow boy, ma’am,’ replied the attendant. And seeing, by the bye, that Brittles had been a slow boy for upwards of thirty years, there appeared no great probability of his ever being a fast one.

‘He gets worse instead of better, I think,’ said the elder lady.

‘It is very inexcusable in him if he stops to play with any other boys,’ said the young lady, smiling.

Mr. Giles was apparently considering the propriety of indulging in a respectful smile himself, when a gig drove up to the garden-gate: out of which there jumped a fat gentleman, who ran straight up to the door: and who, getting quickly into the house by some mysterious process, burst into the room, and nearly overturned Mr. Giles and the breakfast-table together.

‘I never heard of such a thing!’ exclaimed the fat gentleman. ‘My dear Mrs. Maylie—bless my soul—in the silence of the night, too—I *never* heard of such a thing!’

With these expressions of condolence, the fat gentleman shook hands with both ladies, and drawing up a chair, inquired how they found themselves.

‘You ought to be dead; positively dead with the fright,’ said the fat gentleman. ‘Why didn’t you send? Bless me, my man should have come in a minute; and so would I; and my assistant would have been delighted; or anybody, I’m sure, under such circumstances. Dear, dear! So unexpected! In the silence of the night, too!’

The doctor seemed expecially troubled by the fact of the robbery having

been unexpected, and attempted in the night-time; as if it were the established custom of gentlemen in the housebreaking way to transact business at noon, and to make an appointment, by post, a day or two previous.

‘And you, Miss Rose,’ said the doctor, turning to the young lady, ‘I—’

‘Oh! very much so, indeed,’ said Rose, interrupting him; ‘but there is a poor creature upstairs, whom aunt wishes you to see.’

‘Ah! to be sure,’ replied the doctor, ‘so there is. That was your handiwork, Giles, I understand.’

Mr. Giles, who had been feverishly putting the tea-cups to rights, blushed very red, and said that he had had that honour.

‘Honour, eh?’ said the doctor; ‘well, I don’t know; perhaps it’s as honourable to hit a thief in a back kitchen, as to hit your man at twelve paces. Fancy that he fired in the air, and you’ve fought a duel, Giles.’

Mr. Giles, who thought this light treatment of the matter an unjust attempt at diminishing his glory, answered respectfully, that it was not for the like of him to judge about that; but he rather thought it was no joke to the opposite party.

‘Gad, that’s true!’ said the doctor. ‘Where is he? Show me the way. I’ll look in again, as I come down, Mrs. Maylie. That’s the little window that he got in at, eh? Well, I couldn’t have believed it!’

Talking all the way, he followed Mr. Giles upstairs; and while he is going upstairs, the reader may be informed, that Mr. Losberne, a surgeon in the neighbourhood, known through a circuit of ten miles round as ‘the doctor,’ had grown fat, more from good-humour than from good living: and was as kind and hearty, and withal as eccentric an old bachelor, as will be found in five times that space, by any explorer alive.

The doctor was absent, much longer than either he or the ladies had anticipated. A large flat box was fetched out of the gig; and a bedroom bell was rung very often; and the servants ran up and down stairs perpetually; from which tokens it was justly concluded that something important was going on above. At length he returned; and in reply to an anxious inquiry after his patient; looked very mysterious, and closed the door, carefully.

‘This is a very extraordinary thing, Mrs. Maylie,’ said the doctor, standing with his back to the door, as if to keep it shut.

‘He is not in danger, I hope?’ said the old lady.

‘Why, that would *not* be an extraordinary thing, under the circumstances,’ replied the doctor; ‘though I don’t think he is. Have you seen the thief?’

‘No,’ rejoined the old lady.

‘Nor heard anything about him?’

‘No.’

‘I beg your pardon, ma’am, interposed Mr. Giles; ‘but I was going to tell you about him when Doctor Losberne came in.’

The fact was, that Mr. Giles had not, at first, been able to bring his mind to the avowal, that he had only shot a boy. Such commendations had been bestowed upon his bravery, that he could not, for the life of him, help postponing the explanation for a few delicious minutes; during which he had flourished, in the very zenith of a brief reputation for undaunted courage.

‘Rose wished to see the man,’ said Mrs. Maylie, ‘but I wouldn’t hear of it.’

‘Humph!’ rejoined the doctor. ‘There is nothing very alarming in his appearance. Have you any objection to see him in my presence?’

‘If it be necessary,’ replied the old lady, ‘certainly not.’

‘Then I think it is necessary,’ said the doctor; ‘at all events, I am quite sure that you would deeply regret not having done so, if you postponed it. He is perfectly quiet and comfortable now. Allow me—Miss Rose, will you permit me? Not the slightest fear, I pledge you my honour!’

CHAPTER XXX

WITH MANY LOQUACIOUS ASSURANCES that they would be agreeably surprised in the aspect of the criminal, the doctor drew the young lady's arm through one of his; and offering his disengaged hand to Mrs. Maylie, led them, with much ceremony and stateliness, upstairs.

'Now,' said the doctor, in a whisper, as he softly turned the handle of a bedroom-door, 'let us hear what you think of him. He has not been shaved very recently, but he don't look at all ferocious notwithstanding. Stop, though! Let me first see that he is in visiting order.'

Stepping before them, he looked into the room. Motioning them to advance, he closed the door when they had entered; and gently drew back the curtains of the bed. Upon it, in lieu of the dogged, black-visaged ruffian they had expected to behold, there lay a mere child: worn with pain and exhaustion, and sunk into a deep sleep. His wounded arm, bound and splintered up, was crossed upon his breast; his head reclined upon the other arm, which was half hidden by his long hair, as it streamed over the pillow.

The honest gentleman held the curtain in his hand, and looked on, for a minute or so, in silence. Whilst he was watching the patient thus, the younger lady glided softly past, and seating herself in a chair by the bedside, gathered Oliver's hair from his face. As she stooped over him, her tears fell upon his forehead.

The boy stirred, and smiled in his sleep, as though these marks of pity and compassion had awakened some pleasant dream of a love and affection he had never known. Thus, a strain of gentle music, or the rippling of water in a silent place, or the odour of a flower, or the mention of a familiar word, will sometimes call up sudden dim remembrances of scenes that never were, in this life; which vanish like a breath; which some brief memory of a happier existence, long gone by, would seem to have awakened; which no

voluntary exertion of the mind can ever recall.

‘What can this mean?’ exclaimed the elder lady. ‘This poor child can never have been the pupil of robbers!’

‘Vice,’ said the surgeon, replacing the curtain, ‘takes up her abode in many temples; and who can say that a fair outside shell not enshrine her?’

‘But at so early an age!’ urged Rose.

‘My dear young lady,’ rejoined the surgeon, mournfully shaking his head; ‘crime, like death, is not confined to the old and withered alone. The youngest and fairest are too often its chosen victims.’

‘But, can you—oh! can you really believe that this delicate boy has been the voluntary associate of the worst outcasts of society?’ said Rose.

The surgeon shook his head, in a manner which intimated that he feared it was very possible; and observing that they might disturb the patient, led the way into an adjoining apartment.

‘But even if he has been wicked,’ pursued Rose, ‘think how young he is; think that he may never have known a mother’s love, or the comfort of a home; that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to herd with men who have forced him to guilt. Aunt, dear aunt, for mercy’s sake, think of this, before you let them drag this sick child to a prison, which in any case must be the grave of all his chances of amendment. Oh! as you love me, and know that I have never felt the want of parents in your goodness and affection, but that I might have done so, and might have been equally helpless and unprotected with this poor child, have pity upon him before it is too late!’

‘My dear love,’ said the elder lady, as she folded the weeping girl to her bosom, ‘do you think I would harm a hair of his head?’

‘Oh, no!’ replied Rose, eagerly.

‘No, surely,’ said the old lady; ‘my days are drawing to their close: and may mercy be shown to me as I show it to others! What can I do to save him, sir?’

‘Let me think, ma’am,’ said the doctor; ‘let me think.’

Mr. Losberne thrust his hands into his pockets, and took several turns up and down the room; often stopping, and balancing himself on his toes, and frowning frightfully. After various exclamations of ‘I’ve got it now’ and ‘no, I haven’t,’ and as many renewals of the walking and frowning, he at length made a dead halt, and spoke as follows:

‘I think if you give me a full and unlimited commission to bully Giles, and that little boy, Brittles, I can manage it. Giles is a faithful fellow and an old servant, I know; but you can make it up to him in a thousand ways, and reward him for being such a good shot besides. You don’t object to that?’

‘Unless there is some other way of preserving the child,’ replied Mrs. Maylie.

‘There is no other,’ said the doctor. ‘No other, take my word for it.’

‘Then my aunt invests you with full power,’ said Rose, smiling through her tears; ‘but pray don’t be harder upon the poor fellows than is indispensably necessary.’

‘You seem to think,’ retorted the doctor, ‘that everybody is disposed to be hard-hearted to-day, except yourself, Miss Rose. I only hope, for the sake of the rising male sex generally, that you may be found in as vulnerable and soft-hearted a mood by the first eligible young fellow who appeals to your compassion; and I wish I were a young fellow, that I might avail myself, on the spot, of such a favourable opportunity for doing so, as the present.’

‘You are as great a boy as poor Brittles himself,’ returned Rose, blushing.

‘Well,’ said the doctor, laughing heartily, ‘that is no very difficult matter. But to return to this boy. The great point of our agreement is yet to come. He will wake in an hour or so, I dare say; and although I have told that thick-headed constable-fellow downstairs that he musn’t be moved or spoken to, on peril of his life, I think we may converse with him without danger. Now I make this stipulation—that I shall examine him in your presence, and that, if, from what he says, we judge, and I can show to the satisfaction of your cool reason, that he is a real and thorough bad one (which is more than possible), he shall be left to his fate, without any farther interference on my part, at all events.’

‘Oh no, aunt!’ entreated Rose.

‘Oh yes, aunt!’ said the doctor. ‘Is is a bargain?’

‘He cannot be hardened in vice,’ said Rose; ‘It is impossible.’

‘Very good,’ retorted the doctor; ‘then so much the more reason for acceding to my proposition.’

Finally the treaty was entered into; and the parties thereunto sat down to wait, with some impatience, until Oliver should awake.

The patience of the two ladies was destined to undergo a longer trial than Mr. Losberne had led them to expect; for hour after hour passed on, and still Oliver slumbered heavily. It was evening, indeed, before the kind-hearted doctor brought them the intelligence, that he was at length sufficiently restored to be spoken to. The boy was very ill, he said, and weak from the loss of blood; but his mind was so troubled with anxiety to disclose something, that he deemed it better to give him the opportunity, than to insist upon his remaining quiet until next morning: which he should otherwise have done.

The conference was a long one. Oliver told them all his simple history, and was often compelled to stop, by pain and want of strength. It was a solemn thing, to hear, in the darkened room, the feeble voice of the sick child recounting a weary catalogue of evils and calamities which hard men had brought upon him. Oh! if when we oppress and grind our fellow-creatures, we bestowed but one thought on the dark evidences of human error, which, like dense and heavy clouds, are rising, slowly it is true, but not less surely, to Heaven, to pour their after-vengeance on our heads; if we heard but one instant, in imagination, the deep testimony of dead men's voices, which no power can stifle, and no pride shut out; where would be the injury and injustice, the suffering, misery, cruelty, and wrong, that each day's life brings with it!

Oliver's pillow was smoothed by gentle hands that night; and loveliness and virtue watched him as he slept. He felt calm and happy, and could have died without a murmur.

The momentous interview was no sooner concluded, and Oliver composed to rest again, than the doctor, after wiping his eyes, and condemning them for being weak all at once, betook himself downstairs to open upon Mr. Giles. And finding nobody about the parlours, it occurred to him, that he could perhaps originate the proceedings with better effect in the kitchen; so into the kitchen he went.

There were assembled, in that lower house of the domestic parliament, the women-servants, Mr. Brittles, Mr. Giles, the tinker (who had received a special invitation to regale himself for the remainder of the day, in consideration of his services), and the constable. The latter gentleman had a large staff, a large head, large features, and large half-boots; and he looked as if he had been taking a proportionate allowance of ale—as indeed he had.

The adventures of the previous night were still under discussion; for Mr. Giles was expatiating upon his presence of mind, when the doctor entered; Mr. Brittles, with a mug of ale in his hand, was corroborating everything, before his superior said it.

‘Sit still!’ said the doctor, waving his hand.

‘Thank you, sir, said Mr. Giles. ‘Misses wished some ale to be given out, sir; and as I felt no ways inclined for my own little room, sir, and was disposed for company, I am taking mine among ’em here.’

Brittles headed a low murmur, by which the ladies and gentlemen generally were understood to express the gratification they derived from Mr. Giles’s condescension. Mr. Giles looked round with a patronising air, as much as to say that so long as they behaved properly, he would never desert them.

‘How is the patient to-night, sir?’ asked Giles.

‘So-so’; returned the doctor. ‘I am afraid you have got yourself into a scrape there, Mr. Giles.’

‘I hope you don’t mean to say, sir,’ said Mr. Giles, trembling, ‘that he’s going to die. If I thought it, I should never be happy again. I wouldn’t cut a boy off: no, not even Brittles here; not for all the plate in the county, sir.’

‘That’s not the point,’ said the doctor, mysteriously. ‘Mr. Giles, are you a Protestant?’

‘Yes, sir, I hope so,’ faltered Mr. Giles, who had turned very pale.

‘And what are *you*, boy?’ said the doctor, turning sharply upon Brittles.

‘Lord bless me, sir!’ replied Brittles, starting violently; ‘I’m the same as Mr. Giles, sir.’

‘Then tell me this,’ said the doctor, ‘both of you, both of you! Are you going to take upon yourselves to swear, that that boy upstairs is the boy that was put through the little window last night? Out with it! Come! We are prepared for you!’

The doctor, who was universally considered one of the best-tempered creatures on earth, made this demand in such a dreadful tone of anger, that Giles and Brittles, who were considerably muddled by ale and excitement, stared at each other in a state of stupefaction.

‘Pay attention to the reply, constable, will you?’ said the doctor, shaking his forefinger with great solemnity of manner, and tapping the bridge of his nose with it, to bespeak the exercise of that worthy’s utmost acuteness.

‘Something may come of this before long.’

The constable looked as wise as he could, and took up his staff of office: which had been reclining indolently in the chimney-corner.

‘It’s a simple question of identity, you will observe,’ said the doctor.

‘That’s what it is, sir,’ replied the constable, coughing with great violence; for he had finished his ale in a hurry, and some of it had gone the wrong way.

‘Here’s the house broken into,’ said the doctor, ‘and a couple of men catch one moment’s glimpse of a boy, in the midst of gunpowder smoke, and in all the distraction of alarm and darkness. Here’s a boy comes to that very same house, next morning, and because he happens to have his arm tied up, these men lay violent hands upon him—by doing which, they place his life in great danger—and swear he is the thief. Now, the question is, whether these men are justified by the fact; if not, in what situation do they place themselves?’

The constable nodded profoundly. He said, if that wasn’t law, he would be glad to know what was.

‘I ask you again,’ thundered the doctor, ‘are you, on your solemn oaths, able to identify that boy?’

Brittles looked doubtfully at Mr. Giles; Mr. Giles looked doubtfully at Brittles; the constable put his hand behind his ear, to catch the reply; the two women and the tinker leaned forward to listen; the doctor glanced keenly round; when a ring was heard at the gate, and at the same moment, the sound of wheels.

‘It’s the runners!’ cried Brittles, to all appearance much relieved.

‘The what?’ exclaimed the doctor, aghast in his turn.

‘The Bow Street officers, sir,’ replied Brittles, taking up a candle; ‘me and Mr. Giles sent for ’em this morning.’

‘What?’ cried the doctor.

‘Yes,’ replied Brittles; ‘I sent a message up by the coachman, and I only wonder they weren’t here before, sir.’

‘You did, did you? Then confound your—slow coaches down here; that’s all,’ said the doctor, walking away.

CHAPTER XXXI

‘WHO’S THAT?’ INQUIRED BRITTLES, opening the door a little way, with the chain up, and peeping out, shading the candle with his hand.

‘Open the door,’ replied a man outside; ‘it’s the officers from Bow Street, as was sent to to-day.’

Much comforted by this assurance, Brittles opened the door to its full width, and confronted a portly man in a great-coat; who walked in, without saying anything more, and wiped his shoes on the mat, as coolly as if he lived there.

‘Just send somebody out to relieve my mate, will you, young man?’ said the officer; ‘he’s in the gig, a-minding the prad. Have you got a coach ‘us here, that you could put it up in, for five or ten minutes?’

Brittles replying in the affirmative, and pointing out the building, the portly man stepped back to the garden-gate, and helped his companion to put up the gig: while Brittles lighted them, in a state of great admiration. This done, they returned to the house, and, being shown into a parlour, took off their great-coats and hats, and showed like what they were.

The man who had knocked at the door, was a stout personage of middle height, aged about fifty: with shiny black hair, cropped pretty close; half-whiskers, a round face, and sharp eyes. The other was a red-headed, bony man, in top-boots; with a rather ill-favoured countenance, and a turned-up sinister-looking nose.

‘Tell your governor that Blathers and Duff is here, will you?’ said the stouter man, smoothing down his hair, and laying a pair of handcuffs on the table. ‘Oh! Good-evening, master. Can I have a word or two with you in private, if you please?’

This was addressed to Mr. Losberne, who now made his appearance; that gentleman, motioning Brittles to retire, brought in the two ladies, and shut

the door.

‘This is the lady of the house,’ said Mr. Losberne, motioning towards Mrs. Maylie.

Mr. Blathers made a bow. Being desired to sit down, he put his hat on the floor, and taking a chair, motioned to Duff to do the same. The latter gentleman, who did not appear quite so much accustomed to good society, or quite so much at his ease in it—one of the two—seated himself, after undergoing several muscular affections of the limbs, and the head of his stick into his mouth, with some embarrassment.

‘Now, with regard to this here robbery, master,’ said Blathers. ‘What are the circumstances?’

Mr. Losberne, who appeared desirous of gaining time, recounted them at great length, and with much circumlocution. Messrs. Blathers and Duff looked very knowing meanwhile, and occasionally exchanged a nod.

‘I can’t say, for certain, till I see the work, of course,’ said Blathers; ‘but my opinion at once is,—I don’t mind committing myself to that extent,—that this wasn’t done by a yokel; eh, Duff?’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Duff.

‘And, translating the word yokel for the benefit of the ladies, I apprehend your meaning to be, that this attempt was not made by a countryman?’ said Mr. Losberne, with a smile.

‘That’s it, master,’ replied Blathers. ‘This is all about the robbery, is it?’

‘All,’ replied the doctor.

‘Now, what is this, about this here boy that the servants are a-talking on?’ said Blathers.

‘Nothing at all,’ replied the doctor. ‘One of the frightened servants chose to take it into his head, that he had something to do with this attempt to break into the house; but it’s nonsense: sheer absurdity.’

‘Wery easy disposed of, if it is,’ remarked Duff.

‘What he says is quite correct,’ observed Blathers, nodding his head in a confirmatory way, and playing carelessly with the handcuffs, as if they were a pair of castanets. ‘Who is the boy? What account does he give of himself? Where did he come from? He didn’t drop out of the clouds, did he, master?’

‘Of course not,’ replied the doctor, with a nervous glance at the two ladies. ‘I know his whole history: but we can talk about that presently. You would like, first, to see the place where the thieves made their attempt, I

suppose?’

‘Certainly,’ rejoined Mr. Blathers. ‘We had better inspect the premises first, and examine the servants afterwards. That’s the usual way of doing business.’

Lights were then procured; and Messrs. Blathers and Duff, attended by the native constable, Brittles, Giles, and everybody else in short, went into the little room at the end of the passage and looked out at the window; and afterwards went round by way of the lawn, and looked in at the window; and after that, had a candle handed out to inspect the shutter with; and after that, a lantern to trace the footsteps with; and after that, a pitchfork to poke the bushes with. This done, amidst the breathless interest of all beholders, they came in again; and Mr. Giles and Brittles were put through a melodramatic representation of their share in the previous night’s adventures: which they performed some six times over: contradicting each other, in not more than one important respect, the first time, and in not more than a dozen the last. This consummation being arrived at, Blathers and Duff cleared the room, and held a long council together, compared with which, for secrecy and solemnity, a consultation of great doctors on the knottiest point in medicine, would be mere child’s play.

Meanwhile, the doctor walked up and down the next room in a very uneasy state; and Mrs. Maylie and Rose looked on, with anxious faces.

‘Upon my word,’ he said, making a halt, after a great number of very rapid turns, ‘I hardly know what to do.’

‘Surely,’ said Rose, ‘the poor child’s story, faithfully repeated to these men, will be sufficient to exonerate him.’

‘I doubt it, my dear young lady,’ said the doctor, shaking his head. ‘I don’t think it would exonerate him, either with them, or with legal functionaries of a higher grade. What is he, after all, they would say? A runaway. Judged by mere worldly considerations and probabilities, his story is a very doubtful one.’

‘You believe it, surely?’ interrupted Rose.

‘*I* believe it, strange as it is; and perhaps I may be an old fool for doing so,’ rejoined the doctor; ‘but I don’t think it is exactly the tale for a practical police-officer, nevertheless.’

‘Why not?’ demanded Rose.

‘Because, my pretty cross-examiner,’ replied the doctor: ‘because,

viewed with their eyes, there are many ugly points about it; he can only prove the parts that look ill, and none of those that look well. Confound the fellows, they *will* have the why and the wherefore, and will take nothing for granted. On his own showing, you see, he has been the companion of thieves for some time past; he has been carried to a police-officer, on a charge of picking a gentleman's pocket; he has been taken away, forcibly, from that gentleman's house, to a place which he cannot describe or point out, and of the situation of which he has not the remotest idea. He is brought down to Chertsey, by men who seem to have taken a violent fancy to him, whether he will or no; and is put through a window to rob a house; and then, just at the very moment when he is going to alarm the inmates, and so do the very thing that would set him all to rights, there rushes into the way, a blundering dog of a half-bred butler, and shoots him! As if on purpose to prevent his doing any good for himself! Don't you see all this?'

'I see it, of course,' replied Rose, smiling at the doctor's impetuosity; 'but still I do not see anything in it, to criminate the poor child.'

'No,' replied the doctor; 'of course not! Bless the bright eyes of your sex! They never see, whether for good or bad, more than one side of any question; and that is, always, the one which first presents itself to them.'

Having given vent to this result of experience, the doctor put his hands into his pockets, and walked up and down the room with even greater rapidity than before.

'The more I think of it,' said the doctor, 'the more I see that it will occasion endless trouble and difficulty if we put these men in possession of the boy's real story. I am certain it will not be believed; and even if they can do nothing to him in the end, still the dragging it forward, and giving publicity to all the doubts that will be cast upon it, must interfere, materially, with your benevolent plan of rescuing him from misery.'

'Oh! what is to be done?' cried Rose. 'Dear, dear! why did they send for these people?'

'Why, indeed!' exclaimed Mrs. Maylie. 'I would not have had them here, for the world.'

'All I know is,' said Mr. Losberne, at last: sitting down with a kind of desperate calmness, 'that we must try and carry it off with a bold face. The object is a good one, and that must be our excuse. The boy has strong symptoms of fever upon him, and is in no condition to be talked to any

more; that’s one comfort. We must make the best of it; and if bad be the best, it is no fault of ours. Come in!’

‘Well, master,’ said Blathers, entering the room followed by his colleague, and making the door fast, before he said any more. ‘This warn’t a put-up thing.’

‘And what the devil’s a put-up thing?’ demanded the doctor, impatiently.

‘We call it a put-up robbery, ladies,’ said Blathers, turning to them, as if he pitied their ignorance, but had a contempt for the doctor’s, ‘when the servants is in it.’

‘Nobody suspected them, in this case,’ said Mrs. Maylie.

‘Wery likely not, ma’am,’ replied Blathers; ‘but they might have been in it, for all that.’

‘More likely on that wery account,’ said Duff.

‘We find it was a town hand,’ said Blathers, continuing his report; ‘for the style of work is first-rate.’

‘Wery pretty indeed it is,’ remarked Duff, in an undertone.

‘There was two of ’em in it,’ continued Blathers; ‘and they had a boy with ’em; that’s plain from the size of the window. That’s all to be said at present. We’ll see this lad that you’ve got upstairs at once, if you please.’

‘Perhaps they will take something to drink first, Mrs. Maylie?’ said the doctor: his face brightening, as if some new thought had occurred to him.

‘Oh! to be sure!’ exclaimed Rose, eagerly. ‘You shall have it immediately, if you will.’

‘Why, thank you, miss!’ said Blathers, drawing his coat-sleeve across his mouth; ‘it’s dry work, this sort of duty. Any think that’s handy, miss; don’t put yourself out of the way, on our accounts.’

‘What shall it be?’ asked the doctor, following the young lady to the sideboard.

‘A little drop of spirits, master, if it’s all the same,’ replied Blathers. ‘It’s a cold ride from London, ma’am; and I always find that spirits comes home warmer to the feelings.’

This interesting communication was addressed to Mrs. Maylie, who received it very graciously. While it was being conveyed to her, the doctor slipped out of the room.

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Blathers: not holding his wine-glass by the stem, but grasping the bottom between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand: and

placing it in front of his chest; ‘I have seen a good many pieces of business like this, in my time, ladies.’

‘That crack down in the back lane at Edmonton, Blathers,’ said Mr. Duff, assisting his colleague’s memory.

‘That was something in this way, warn’t it?’ rejoined Mr. Blathers; ‘that was done by Conkey Chickweed, that was.’

‘You always gave that to him,’ replied Duff. ‘It was the Family Pet, I tell you. Conkey hadn’t any more to do with it than I had.’

‘Get out!’ retorted Mr. Blathers; ‘I know better. Do you mind that time when Conkey was robbed of his money, though? What a start that was! Better than any novel-book *I* ever see!’

‘What was that?’ inquired Rose: anxious to encourage any symptoms of good-humour in the unwelcome visitors.

‘It was a robbery, miss, that hardly anybody would have been down upon,’ said Blathers. ‘This here Conkey Chickweed—’

‘Conkey means Nosey, ma’am,’ interposed Duff.

‘Of course the lady knows that, don’t she?’ demanded Mr. Blathers. ‘Always interrupting, you are, partner! This here Conkey Chickweed, miss, kept a public-house over Battlebridge way, and he had a cellar, where a good many young lords went to see cock-fighting, and badger-drawing, and that; and a wery intellectual manner the sports was conducted in, for I’ve seen ’em off’en. He warn’t one of the family, at that time; and one night he was robbed of three hundred and twenty-seven guineas in a canvas bag, that was stole out of his bedroom in the dead of night, by a tall man with a black patch over his eye, who had concealed himself under the bed, and after committing the robbery, jumped slap out of window: which was only a story high. He was wery quick about it. But Conkey was quick, too; for he fired a blunderbuss arter him, and roused the neighbourhood. They set up a hue-and-cry, directly, and when they came to look about ’em, found that Conkey had hit the robber; for there was traces of blood, all the way to some palings a good distance off; and there they lost ’em. However, he had made off with the blunt; and, consequently, the name of Mr. Chickweed, licensed witler, appeared in the Gazette among the other bankrupts; and all manner of benefits and subscriptions, and I don’t know what all, was got up for the poor man, who was in a wery low state of mind about his loss, and went up and down the streets, for three or four days, a pulling his hair off in

such a desperate manner that many people was afraid he might be going to make away with himself. One day he came up to the office, all in a hurry, and had a private interview with the magistrate, who, after a deal of talk, rings the bell, and orders Jem Spyers in (Jem was a active officer), and tells him to go and assist Mr. Chickweed in apprehending the man as robbed his house. “I see him, Spyers,” said Chickweed, “pass my house yesterday morning,” “Why didn’t you up, and collar him!” says Spyers. “I was so struck all of a heap, that you might have fractured my skull with a toothpick,” says the poor man; “but we’re sure to have him; for between ten and eleven o’clock at night he passed again.” Spyers no sooner heard this, than he put some clean linen and a comb, in his pocket, in case he should have to stop a day or two; and away he goes, and sets himself down at one of the public-house windows behind the little red curtain, with his hat on, all ready to bolt out, at a moment’s notice. He was smoking his pipe here, late at night, when all of a sudden Chickweed roars out, “Here he is! Stop thief! Murder!” Jem Spyers dashes out; and there he sees Chickweed, a-tearing down the street full cry. Away goes Spyers; on goes Chickweed; round turns the people; everybody roars out, “Thieves!” and Chickweed himself keeps on shouting, all the time, like mad. Spyers loses sight of him a minute as he turns a corner; shoots round; sees a little crowd; dives in; “Which is the man?” “D—me!” says Chickweed, “I’ve lost him again!” It was a remarkable occurrence, but he warn’t to be seen nowhere, so they went back to the public-house. Next morning, Spyers took his old place, and looked out, from behind the curtain, for a tall man with a black patch over his eye, till his own two eyes ached again. At last, he couldn’t help shutting ’em, to ease ’em a minute; and the very moment he did so, he hears Chickweed a-roaring out, “Here he is!” Off he starts once more, with Chickweed half-way down the street ahead of him; and after twice as long a run as the yesterday’s one, the man’s lost again! This was done, once or twice more, till one-half the neighbours gave out that Mr. Chickweed had been robbed by the devil, who was playing tricks with him arterwards; and the other half, that poor Mr. Chickweed had gone mad with grief.’

‘What did Jem Spyers say?’ inquired the doctor; who had returned to the room shortly after the commencement of the story.

‘Jem Spyers,’ resumed the officer, ‘for a long time said nothing at all, and listened to everything without seeming to, which showed he understood

his business. But, one morning, he walked into the bar, and taking out his snuffbox, says “Chickweed, I’ve found out who done this here robbery.” “Have you?” said Chickweed. “Oh, my dear Spyers, only let me have wengeance, and I shall die contented! Oh, my dear Spyers, where is the villain!” “Come!” said Spyers, offering him a pinch of snuff, “none of that gammon! You did it yourself.” So he had; and a good bit of money he had made by it, too; and nobody would never have found it out, if he hadn’t been so precious anxious to keep up appearances!’ said Mr. Blathers, putting down his wine-glass, and clinking the handcuffs together.

‘Very curious, indeed,’ observed the doctor. ‘Now, if you please, you can walk upstairs.’

‘If *you* please, sir,’ returned Mr. Blathers. Closely following Mr. Losberne, the two officers ascended to Oliver’s bedroom; Mr. Giles preceding the party, with a lighted candle.

Oliver had been dozing; but looked worse, and was more feverish than he had appeared yet. Being assisted by the doctor, he managed to sit up in bed for a minute or so; and looked at the strangers without at all understanding what was going forward—in fact, without seeming to recollect where he was, or what had been passing.

‘This,’ said Mr. Losberne, speaking softly, but with great vehemence notwithstanding, ‘this is the lad, who, being accidently wounded by a spring-gun in some boyish trespass on Mr. What-d’ ye-call-him’s grounds, at the back here, comes to the house for assistance this morning, and is immediately laid hold of and maltreated, by that ingenious gentleman with the candle in his hand: who has placed his life in considerable danger, as I can professionally certify.’

Messrs. Blathers and Duff looked at Mr. Giles, as he was thus recommended to their notice. The bewildered butler gazed from them towards Oliver, and from Oliver towards Mr. Losberne, with a most ludicrous mixture of fear and perplexity.

‘You don’t mean to deny that, I suppose?’ said the doctor, laying Oliver gently down again.

‘It was all done for the—for the best, sir,’ answered Giles. ‘I am sure I thought it was the boy, or I wouldn’t have meddled with him. I am not of an inhuman disposition, sir.’

‘Thought it was what boy?’ inquired the senior officer.

‘The housebreaker’s boy, sir!’ replied Giles. ‘They—they certainly had a boy.’

‘Well? Do you think so now?’ inquired Blathers.

‘Think what, now?’ replied Giles, looking vacantly at his questioner.

‘Think it’s the same boy, Stupid-head?’ rejoined Blathers, impatiently.

‘I don’t know; I really don’t know,’ said Giles, with a rueful countenance. ‘I couldn’t swear to him.’

‘What do you think?’ asked Mr. Blathers.

‘I don’t know what to think,’ replied poor Giles. ‘I don’t think it is the boy; indeed, I’m almost certain that it isn’t. You know it can’t be.’

‘Has this man been a-drinking, sir?’ inquired Blathers, turning to the doctor.

‘What a precious muddle-headed chap you are!’ said Duff, addressing Mr. Giles, with supreme contempt.

Mr. Losberne had been feeling the patient’s pulse during this short dialogue; but he now rose from the chair by the bedside, and remarked, that if the officers had any doubts upon the subject, they would perhaps like to step into the next room, and have Brittles before them.

Acting upon this suggestion, they adjourned to a neighbouring apartment, where Mr. Brittles, being called in, involved himself and his respected superior in such a wonderful maze of fresh contradictions and impossibilities, as tended to throw no particular light on anything, but the fact of his own strong mystification; except, indeed, his declarations that he shouldn’t know the real boy, if he were put before him that instant; that he had only taken Oliver to be he, because Mr. Giles had said he was; and that Mr. Giles had, five minutes previously, admitted in the kitchen, that he began to be very much afraid he had been a little too hasty.

Among other ingenious surmises, the question was then raised, whether Mr. Giles had really hit anybody; and upon examination of the fellow pistol to that which he had fired, it turned out to have no more destructive loading than gunpowder and brown paper: a discovery which made a considerable impression on everybody but the doctor, who had drawn the ball about ten minutes before. Upon no one, however, did it make a greater impression than on Mr. Giles himself; who, after labouring, for some hours, under the fear of having mortally wounded a fellow-creature, eagerly caught at this new idea, and favoured it to the utmost. Finally, the officers, without

troubling themselves very much about Oliver, left the Chertsey constable in the house, and took up their rest for that night in the town; promising to return the next morning.

With the next morning, there came a rumour, that two men and a boy were in the cage at Kingston, who had been apprehended over night under suspicious circumstances; and to Kingston Messrs. Blathers and Duff journeyed accordingly. The suspicious circumstances, however, resolving themselves, on investigation, into the one fact, that they had been discovered sleeping under a haystack; which, although a great crime, is only punishable by imprisonment, and is, in the merciful eye of the English law, and its comprehensive love of all the King's subjects, held to be no satisfactory proof, in the absence of all other evidence, that the sleeper, or sleepers, have committed burglary accompanied with violence, and have therefore rendered themselves liable to the punishment of death; Messrs. Blathers and Duff came back again, as wise as they went.

In short, after some more examination, and a great deal more conversation, a neighbouring magistrate was readily induced to take the joint bail of Mrs. Maylie and Mr. Losberne for Oliver's appearance if he should ever be called upon; and Blathers and Duff, being rewarded with a couple of guineas, returned to town with divided opinions on the subject of their expedition: the latter gentleman on a mature consideration of all the circumstances, inclining to the belief that the burglarious attempt had originated with the Family Pet; and the former being equally disposed to concede the full merit of it to the great Mr. Conkey Chickweed.

Meanwhile, Oliver gradually throve and prospered under the united care of Mrs. Maylie, Rose, and the kind-hearted Mr. Losberne. If fervent prayers, gushing from hearts overcharged with gratitude, be heard in heaven —and if they be not, what prayers are!—the blessings which the orphan child called down upon them, sunk into their souls, diffusing peace and happiness.

CHAPTER XXXII

OLIVER'S AILINGS WERE NEITHER slight nor few. In addition to the pain and delay attendant on a broken limb, his exposure to the wet and cold had brought on fever and ague: which hung about him for many weeks, and reduced him sadly. But, at length, he began, by slow degrees, to get better, and to be able to say sometimes, in a few tearful words, how deeply he felt the goodness of the two sweet ladies, and how ardently he hoped that when he grew strong and well again, he could do something to show his gratitude; only something, which would let them see the love and duty with which his breast was full; something, however slight, which would prove to them that their gentle kindness had not been cast away; but that the poor boy whom their charity had rescued from misery, or death, was eager to serve them with his whole heart and soul.

'Poor fellow!' said Rose, when Oliver had been one day feebly endeavouring to utter the words of thankfulness that rose to his pale lips; 'you shall have many opportunities of serving us, if you will. We are going into the country, and my aunt intends that you shall accompany us. The quiet place, the pure air, and all the pleasure and beauties of spring, will restore you in a few days. We will employ you in a hundred ways, when you can bear the trouble.'

'The trouble!' cried Oliver. 'Oh! dear lady, if I could but work for you; if I could only give you pleasure by watering your flowers, or watching your birds, or running up and down the whole day long, to make you happy; what would I give to do it!'

'You shall give nothing at all,' said Miss Maylie, smiling; 'for, as I told you before, we shall employ you in a hundred ways; and if you only take half the trouble to please us, that you promise now, you will make me very happy indeed.'

‘Happy, ma’am!’ cried Oliver; ‘how kind of you to say so!’

‘You will make me happier than I can tell you,’ replied the young lady. ‘To think that my dear good aunt should have been the means of rescuing any one from such sad misery as you have described to us, would be an unspeakable pleasure to me; but to know that the object of her goodness and compassion was sincerely grateful and attached, in consequence, would delight me, more than you can well imagine. Do you understand me?’ she inquired, watching Oliver’s thoughtful face.

‘Oh yes, ma’am, yes!’ replied Oliver eagerly; ‘but I was thinking that I am ungrateful now.’

‘To whom?’ inquired the young lady.

‘To the kind gentleman, and the dear old nurse, who took so much care of me before,’ rejoined Oliver. ‘If they knew how happy I am, they would be pleased, I am sure.’

‘I am sure they would,’ rejoined Oliver’s benefactress; ‘and Mr. Losberne has already been kind enough to promise that when you are well enough to bear the journey, he will carry you to see them.’

‘Has he, ma’am?’ cried Oliver, his face brightening with pleasure. ‘I don’t know what I shall do for joy when I see their kind faces once again!’

In a short time Oliver was sufficiently recovered to undergo the fatigue of this expedition. One morning he and Mr. Losberne set out, accordingly, in a little carriage which belonged to Mrs. Maylie. When they came to Chertsey Bridge, Oliver turned very pale, and uttered a loud exclamation.

‘What’s the matter with the boy?’ cried the doctor, as usual, all in a bustle. ‘Do you see anything—hear anything—feel anything—eh?’

‘That, sir,’ cried Oliver, pointing out of the carriage window. ‘That house!’

‘Yes; well, what of it? Stop coachman. Pull up here,’ cried the doctor. ‘What of the house, my man; eh?’

‘The thieves—the house they took me to!’ whispered Oliver.

‘The devil it is!’ cried the doctor. ‘Hallo, there! let me out!’

But, before the coachman could dismount from his box, he had tumbled out of the coach, by some means or other; and, running down to the deserted tenement, began kicking at the door like a madman.

‘Halloa?’ said a little ugly hump-backed man: opening the door so suddenly, that the doctor, from the very impetus of his last kick, nearly fell

forward into the passage. ‘What’s the matter here?’

‘Matter!’ exclaimed the other, collaring him, without a moment’s reflection. ‘A good deal. Robbery is the matter.’

‘There’ll be Murder the matter, too,’ replied the hump-backed man, coolly, ‘if you don’t take your hands off. Do you hear me?’

‘I hear you,’ said the doctor, giving his captive a hearty shake.

‘Where’s—confound the fellow, what’s his rascally name—Sikes; that’s it. Where’s Sikes, you thief?’

The hump-backed man stared, as if in excess of amazement and indignation; then, twisting himself, dexterously, from the doctor’s grasp, growled forth a volley of horrid oaths, and retired into the house. Before he could shut the door, however, the doctor had passed into the parlour, without a word of parley.

He looked anxiously round; not an article of furniture; not a vestige of anything, animate or inanimate; not even the position of the cupboards; answered Oliver’s description!

‘Now!’ said the hump-backed man, who had watched him keenly, ‘what do you mean by coming into my house, in this violent way? Do you want to rob me, or to murder me? Which is it?’

‘Did you ever know a man come out to do either, in a chariot and pair, you ridiculous old vampire?’ said the irritable doctor.

‘What do you want, then?’ demanded the hunchback. ‘Will you take yourself off, before I do you a mischief? Curse you!’

‘As soon as I think proper,’ said Mr. Losberne, looking into the other parlour; which, like the first, bore no resemblance whatever to Oliver’s account of it. ‘I shall find you out, some day, my friend.’

‘Will you?’ sneered the ill-favoured cripple. ‘If you ever want me, I’m here. I haven’t lived here mad and all alone, for five-and-twenty years, to be scared by you. You shall pay for this; you shall pay for this.’ And so saying, the mis-shapen little demon set up a yell, and danced upon the ground, as if wild with rage.

‘Stupid enough, this,’ muttered the doctor to himself; ‘the boy must have made a mistake. Here! Put that in your pocket, and shut yourself up again.’ With these words he flung the hunchback a piece of money, and returned to the carriage.

The man followed to the chariot door, uttering the wildest imprecations

and curses all the way; but as Mr. Losberne turned to speak to the driver, he looked into the carriage, and eyed Oliver for an instant with a glance so sharp and fierce and at the same time so furious and vindictive, that, waking or sleeping, he could not forget it for months afterwards. He continued to utter the most fearful imprecations, until the driver had resumed his seat; and when they were once more on their way, they could see him some distance behind: beating his feet upon the ground, and tearing his hair, in transports of real or pretended rage.

‘I am an ass!’ said the doctor, after a long silence. ‘Did you know that before, Oliver?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Then don’t forget it another time.’

‘An ass,’ said the doctor again, after a further silence of some minutes. ‘Even if it had been the right place, and the right fellows had been there, what could I have done, single-handed? And if I had had assistance, I see no good that I should have done, except leading to my own exposure, and an unavoidable statement of the manner in which I have hushed up this business. That would have served me right, though. I am always involving myself in some scrape or other, by acting on impulse. It might have done me good.’

Now, the fact was that the excellent doctor had never acted upon anything but impulse all through his life, and it was no bad compliment to the nature of the impulses which governed him, that so far from being involved in any peculiar troubles or misfortunes, he had the warmest respect and esteem of all who knew him. If the truth must be told, he was a little out of temper, for a minute or two, at being disappointed in procuring corroborative evidence of Oliver’s story on the very first occasion on which he had a chance of obtaining any. He soon came round again, however; and finding that Oliver’s replies to his questions, were still as straightforward and consistent, and still delivered with as much apparent sincerity and truth, as they had ever been, he made up his mind to attach full credence to them, from that time forth.

As Oliver knew the name of the street in which Mr. Brownlow resided, they were enabled to drive straight thither. When the coach turned into it, his heart beat so violently, that he could scarcely draw his breath.

‘Now, my boy, which house is it?’ inquired Mr. Losberne.

‘That! That!’ replied Oliver, pointing eagerly out of the window. ‘The white house. Oh! make haste! Pray make haste! I feel as if I should die: it makes me tremble so.’

‘Come, come!’ said the good doctor, patting him on the shoulder. ‘You will see them directly, and they will be overjoyed to find you safe and well.’

‘Oh! I hope so!’ cried Oliver. ‘They were so good to me; so very, very good to me.’

The coach rolled on. It stopped. No; that was the wrong house; the next door. It went on a few paces, and stopped again. Oliver looked up at the windows, with tears of happy expectation coursing down his face.

Alas! the white house was empty, and there was a bill in the window. ‘To Let.’

‘Knock at the next door,’ cried Mr. Losberne, taking Oliver’s arm in his. ‘What has become of Mr. Brownlow, who used to live in the adjoining house, do you know?’

The servant did not know; but would go and inquire. She presently returned, and said, that Mr. Brownlow had sold off his goods, and gone to the West Indies, six weeks before. Oliver clasped his hands, and sank feebly backward.

‘Has his housekeeper gone too?’ inquired Mr. Losberne, after a moment’s pause.

‘Yes, sir’; replied the servant. ‘The old gentleman, the housekeeper, and a gentleman who was a friend of Mr. Brownlow’s, all went together.’

‘Then turn towards home again,’ said Mr. Losberne to the driver; ‘and don’t stop to bait the horses, till you get out of this confounded London!’

‘The book-stall keeper, sir?’ said Oliver. ‘I know the way there. See him, pray, sir! Do see him!’

‘My poor boy, this is disappointment enough for one day,’ said the doctor. ‘Quite enough for both of us. If we go to the book-stall keeper’s, we shall certainly find that he is dead, or has set his house on fire, or run away. No; home again straight!’ And in obedience to the doctor’s impulse, home they went.

This bitter disappointment caused Oliver much sorrow and grief, even in the midst of his happiness; for he had pleased himself, many times during his illness, with thinking of all that Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin would say to him: and what delight it would be to tell them how many long days

and nights he had passed in reflecting on what they had done for him, and in bewailing his cruel separation from them. The hope of eventually clearing himself with them, too, and explaining how he had been forced away, had buoyed him up, and sustained him, under many of his recent trials; and now, the idea that they should have gone so far, and carried with them the belief that he was an impostor and a robber—a belief which might remain uncontradicted to his dying day—was almost more than he could bear.

The circumstance occasioned no alteration, however, in the behaviour of his benefactors. After another fortnight, when the fine warm weather had fairly begun, and every tree and flower was putting forth its young leaves and rich blossoms, they made preparations for quitting the house at Chertsey, for some months.

Sending the plate, which had so excited Fagin’s cupidity, to the banker’s; and leaving Giles and another servant in care of the house, they departed to a cottage at some distance in the country, and took Oliver with them.

Who can describe the pleasure and delight, the peace of mind and soft tranquillity, the sickly boy felt in the balmy air, and among the green hills and rich woods, of an inland village! Who can tell how scenes of peace and quietude sink into the minds of pain-worn dwellers in close and noisy places, and carry their own freshness, deep into their jaded hearts! Men who have lived in crowded, pent-up streets, through lives of toil, and who have never wished for change; men, to whom custom has indeed been second nature, and who have come almost to love each brick and stone that formed the narrow boundaries of their daily walks; even they, with the hand of death upon them, have been known to yearn at last for one short glimpse of Nature’s face; and, carried far from the scenes of their old pains and pleasures, have seemed to pass at once into a new state of being. Crawling forth, from day to day, to some green sunny spot, they have had such memories wakened up within them by the sight of the sky, and hill and plain, and glistening water, that a foretaste of heaven itself has soothed their quick decline, and they have sunk into their tombs, as peacefully as the sun whose setting they watched from their lonely chamber window but a few hours before, faded from their dim and feeble sight! The memories which peaceful country scenes call up, are not of this world, nor of its thoughts and hopes. Their gentle influence may teach us how to weave fresh garlands

for the graves of those we loved: may purify our thoughts, and bear down before it old enmity and hatred; but beneath all this, there lingers, in the least reflective mind, a vague and half-formed consciousness of having held such feelings long before, in some remote and distant time, which calls up solemn thoughts of distant times to come, and bends down pride and worldliness beneath it.

It was a lovely spot to which they repaired. Oliver, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling, seemed to enter on a new existence there. The rose and honeysuckle clung to the cottage walls; the ivy crept round the trunks of the trees; and the garden-flowers perfumed the air with delicious odours. Hard by, was a little churchyard; not crowded with tall unsightly gravestones, but full of humble mounds, covered with fresh turf and moss: beneath which, the old people of the village lay at rest. Oliver often wandered here; and, thinking of the wretched grave in which his mother lay, would sometimes sit him down and sob unseen; but, when he raised his eyes to the deep sky overhead, he would cease to think of her as lying in the ground, and would weep for her, sadly, but without pain.

It was a happy time. The days were peaceful and serene; the nights brought with them neither fear nor care; no languishing in a wretched prison, or associating with wretched men; nothing but pleasant and happy thoughts. Every morning he went to a white-headed old gentleman, who lived near the little church: who taught him to read better, and to write: and who spoke so kindly, and took such pains, that Oliver could never try enough to please him. Then, he would walk with Mrs. Maylie and Rose, and hear them talk of books; or perhaps sit near them, in some shady place, and listen whilst the young lady read: which he could have done, until it grew too dark to see the letters. Then, he had his own lesson for the next day to prepare; and at this, he would work hard, in a little room which looked into the garden, till evening came slowly on, when the ladies would walk out again, and he with them: listening with such pleasure to all they said: and so happy if they wanted a flower that he could climb to reach, or had forgotten anything he could run to fetch: that he could never be quick enough about it. When it became quite dark, and they returned home, the young lady would sit down to the piano, and play some pleasant air, or sing, in a low and gentle voice, some old song which it pleased her aunt to hear.

There would be no candles lighted at such times as these; and Oliver would sit by one of the windows, listening to the sweet music, in a perfect rapture.

And when Sunday came, how differently the day was spent, from any way in which he had ever spent it yet! and how happily too; like all the other days in that most happy time! There was the little church, in the morning, with the green leaves fluttering at the windows: the birds singing without: and the sweet-smelling air stealing in at the low porch, and filling the homely building with its fragrance. The poor people were so neat and clean, and knelt so reverently in prayer, that it seemed a pleasure, not a tedious duty, their assembling there together; and though the singing might be rude, it was real, and sounded more musical (to Oliver's ears at least) than any he had ever heard in church before. Then, there were the walks as usual, and many calls at the clean houses of the labouring men; and at night, Oliver read a chapter or two from the Bible, which he had been studying all the week, and in the performance of which duty he felt more proud and pleased, than if he had been the clergyman himself.

In the morning, Oliver would be a-foot by six o'clock, roaming the fields, and plundering the hedges, far and wide, for nosegays of wild flowers, with which he would return laden, home; and which it took great care and consideration to arrange, to the best advantage, for the embellishment of the breakfast-table. There was fresh groundsel, too, for Miss Maylie's birds, with which Oliver, who had been studying the subject under the able tuition of the village clerk, would decorate the cages, in the most approved taste. When the birds were made all spruce and smart for the day, there was usually some little commission of charity to execute in the village; or, failing that, there was rare cricket-playing, sometimes, on the green; or, failing that, there was always something to do in the garden, or about the plants, to which Oliver (who had studied this science also, under the same master, who was a gardener by trade,) applied himself with hearty good-will, until Miss Rose made her appearance: when there were a thousand commendations to be bestowed on all he had done.

So three months glided away; three months which, in the life of the most blessed and favoured of mortals, might have been unmingled happiness, and which, in Oliver's were true felicity. With the purest and most amiable generosity on one side; and the truest, warmest, soul-felt gratitude on the other; it is no wonder that, by the end of that short time, Oliver Twist had

become completely domesticated with the old lady and her niece, and that the fervent attachment of his young and sensitive heart, was repaid by their pride in, and attachment to, himself.

CHAPTER XXXIII

SPRING FLEW SWIFTLY BY, and summer came. If the village had been beautiful at first it was now in the full glow and luxuriance of its richness. The great trees, which had looked shrunken and bare in the earlier months, had now burst into strong life and health; and stretching forth their green arms over the thirsty ground, converted open and naked spots into choice nooks, where was a deep and pleasant shade from which to look upon the wide prospect, steeped in sunshine, which lay stretched beyond. The earth had donned her mantle of brightest green; and shed her richest perfumes abroad. It was the prime and vigour of the year; all things were glad and flourishing.

Still, the same quiet life went on at the little cottage, and the same cheerful serenity prevailed among its inmates. Oliver had long since grown stout and healthy; but health or sickness made no difference in his warm feelings of a great many people. He was still the same gentle, attached, affectionate creature that he had been when pain and suffering had wasted his strength, and when he was dependent for every slight attention, and comfort on those who tended him.

One beautiful night, when they had taken a longer walk than was customary with them: for the day had been unusually warm, and there was a brilliant moon, and a light wind had sprung up, which was unusually refreshing. Rose had been in high spirits, too, and they had walked on, in merry conversation, until they had far exceeded their ordinary bounds. Mrs. Maylie being fatigued, they returned more slowly home. The young lady merely throwing off her simple bonnet, sat down to the piano as usual. After running abstractedly over the keys for a few minutes, she fell into a low and very solemn air; and as she played it, they heard a sound as if she were weeping.

‘Rose, my dear!’ said the elder lady.

Rose made no reply, but played a little quicker, as though the words had roused her from some painful thoughts.

‘Rose, my love!’ cried Mrs. Maylie, rising hastily, and bending over her. ‘What is this? In tears! My dear child, what distresses you?’

‘Nothing, aunt; nothing,’ replied the young lady. ‘I don’t know what it is; I can’t describe it; but I feel—’

‘Not ill, my love?’ interposed Mrs. Maylie.

‘No, no! Oh, not ill!’ replied Rose: shuddering as though some deadly chillness were passing over her, while she spoke; ‘I shall be better presently. Close the window, pray!’

Oliver hastened to comply with her request. The young lady, making an effort to recover her cheerfulness, strove to play some livelier tune; but her fingers dropped powerless over the keys. Covering her face with her hands, she sank upon a sofa, and gave vent to the tears which she was now unable to repress.

‘My child!’ said the elderly lady, folding her arms about her, ‘I never saw you so before.’

‘I would not alarm you if I could avoid it,’ rejoined Rose; ‘but indeed I have tried very hard, and cannot help this. I fear I *am* ill, aunt.’

She was, indeed; for, when candles were brought, they saw that in the very short time which had elapsed since their return home, the hue of her countenance had changed to a marble whiteness. Its expression had lost nothing of its beauty; but it was changed; and there was an anxious haggard look about the gentle face, which it had never worn before. Another minute, and it was suffused with a crimson flush: and a heavy wildness came over the soft blue eye. Again this disappeared, like the shadow thrown by a passing cloud; and she was once more deadly pale.

Oliver, who watched the old lady anxiously, observed that she was alarmed by these appearances; and so in truth, was he; but seeing that she affected to make light of them, he endeavoured to do the same, and they so far succeeded, that when Rose was persuaded by her aunt to retire for the night, she was in better spirits; and appeared even in better health: assuring them that she felt certain she should rise in the morning, quite well.

‘I hope,’ said Oliver, when Mrs. Maylie returned, ‘that nothing is the matter? She don’t look well to-night, but—’

The old lady motioned to him not to speak; and sitting herself down in a dark corner of the room, remained silent for some time. At length, she said, in a trembling voice:

‘I hope not, Oliver. I have been very happy with her for some years: too happy, perhaps. It may be time that I should meet with some misfortune; but I hope it is not this.’

‘What?’ inquired Oliver.

‘The heavy blow,’ said the old lady, ‘of losing the dear girl who has so long been my comfort and happiness.’

‘Oh! God forbid!’ exclaimed Oliver, hastily.

‘Amen to that, my child!’ said the old lady, wringing her hands.

‘Surely there is no danger of anything so dreadful?’ said Oliver. ‘Two hours ago, she was quite well.’

‘She is very ill now,’ rejoined Mrs. Maylies; ‘and will be worse, I am sure. My dear, dear Rose! Oh, what shall I do without her!’

She gave way to such great grief, that Oliver, suppressing his own emotion, ventured to remonstrate with her; and to beg, earnestly, that, for the sake of the dear young lady herself, she would be more calm.

‘And consider, ma’am,’ said Oliver, as the tears forced themselves into his eyes, despite of his efforts to the contrary. ‘Oh! consider how young and good she is, and what pleasure and comfort she gives to all about her. I am sure—certain—quite certain—that, for your sake, who are so good yourself; and for her own; and for the sake of all she makes so happy; she will not die. Heaven will never let her die so young.’

‘Hush!’ said Mrs. Maylie, laying her hand on Oliver’s head. ‘You think like a child, poor boy. But you teach me my duty, notwithstanding. I had forgotten it for a moment, Oliver, but I hope I may be pardoned, for I am old, and have seen enough of illness and death to know the agony of separation from the objects of our love. I have seen enough, too, to know that it is not always the youngest and best who are spared to those that love them; but this should give us comfort in our sorrow; for Heaven is just; and such things teach us, impressively, that there is a brighter world than this; and that the passage to it is speedy. God’s will be done! I love her; and He knows how well!’

Oliver was surprised to see that as Mrs. Maylie said these words, she checked her lamentations as though by one effort; and drawing herself up as

she spoke, became composed and firm. He was still more astonished to find that this firmness lasted; and that, under all the care and watching which ensued, Mrs. Maylie was ever ready and collected: performing all the duties which had devolved upon her, steadily, and, to all external appearances, even cheerfully. But he was young, and did not know what strong minds are capable of, under trying circumstances. How should he, when their possessors so seldom know themselves?

An anxious night ensued. When morning came, Mrs. Maylie's predictions were but too well verified. Rose was in the first stage of a high and dangerous fever.

'We must be active, Oliver, and not give way to useless grief,' said Mrs. Maylie, laying her finger on her lip, as she looked steadily into his face; 'this letter must be sent, with all possible expedition, to Mr. Losberne. It must be carried to the market-town: which is not more than four miles off, by the footpath across the field: and thence dispatched, by an express on horseback, straight to Chertsey. The people at the inn will undertake to do this: and I can trust to you to see it done, I know.'

Oliver could make no reply, but looked his anxiety to be gone at once.

'Here is another letter,' said Mrs. Maylie, pausing to reflect; 'but whether to send it now, or wait until I see how Rose goes on, I scarcely know. I would not forward it, unless I feared the worst.'

'Is it for Chertsey, too, ma'am?' inquired Oliver; impatient to execute his commission, and holding out his trembling hand for the letter.

'No,' replied the old lady, giving it to him mechanically. Oliver glanced at it, and saw that it was directed to Harry Maylie, Esquire, at some great lord's house in the country; where, he could not make out.

'Shall it go, ma'am?' asked Oliver, looking up, impatiently.

'I think not,' replied Mrs. Maylie, taking it back. 'I will wait until to-morrow.'

With these words, she gave Oliver her purse, and he started off, without more delay, at the greatest speed he could muster.

Swiftly he ran across the fields, and down the little lanes which sometimes divided them: now almost hidden by the high corn on either side, and now emerging on an open field, where the mowers and haymakers were busy at their work: nor did he stop once, save now and then, for a few seconds, to recover breath, until he came, in a great heat, and covered with

dust, on the little market-place of the market-town.

Here he paused, and looked about for the inn. There were a white bank, and a red brewery, and a yellow town-hall; and in one corner there was a large house, with all the wood about it painted green: before which was the sign of ‘The George.’ To this he hastened, as soon as it caught his eye.

He spoke to a postboy who was dozing under the gateway; and who, after hearing what he wanted, referred him to the ostler; who after hearing all he had to say again, referred him to the landlord; who was a tall gentleman in a blue neckcloth, a white hat, drab breeches, and boots with tops to match, leaning against a pump by the stable-door, picking his teeth with a silver toothpick.

This gentleman walked with much deliberation into the bar to make out the bill: which took a long time making out: and after it was ready, and paid, a horse had to be saddled, and a man to be dressed, which took up ten good minutes more. Meanwhile Oliver was in such a desperate state of impatience and anxiety, that he felt as if he could have jumped upon the horse himself, and galloped away, full tear, to the next stage. At length, all was ready; and the little parcel having been handed up, with many injunctions and entreaties for its speedy delivery, the man set spurs to his horse, and rattling over the uneven paving of the market-place, was out of the town, and galloping along the turnpike-road, in a couple of minutes.

As it was something to feel certain that assistance was sent for, and that no time had been lost, Oliver hurried up the inn-yard, with a somewhat lighter heart. He was turning out of the gateway when he accidently stumbled against a tall man wrapped in a cloak, who was at that moment coming out of the inn door.

‘Hah!’ cried the man, fixing his eyes on Oliver, and suddenly recoiling. ‘What the devil’s this?’

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ said Oliver; ‘I was in a great hurry to get home, and didn’t see you were coming.’

‘Death!’ muttered the man to himself, glaring at the boy with his large dark eyes. ‘Who would have thought it! Grind him to ashes! He’d start up from a stone coffin, to come in my way!’

‘I am sorry,’ stammered Oliver, confused by the strange man’s wild look. ‘I hope I have not hurt you!’

‘Rot you!’ murmured the man, in a horrible passion; between his

clenched teeth; ‘if I had only had the courage to say the word, I might have been free of you in a night. Curses on your head, and black death on your heart, you imp! What are you doing here?’

The man shook his fist, as he uttered these words incoherently. He advanced towards Oliver, as if with the intention of aiming a blow at him, but fell violently on the ground: writhing and foaming, in a fit.

Oliver gazed, for a moment, at the struggles of the madman (for such he supposed him to be); and then darted into the house for help. Having seen him safely carried into the hotel, he turned his face homewards, running as fast as he could, to make up for lost time: and recalling with a great deal of astonishment and some fear, the extraordinary behaviour of the person from whom he had just parted.

The circumstance did not dwell in his recollection long, however: for when he reached the cottage, there was enough to occupy his mind, and to drive all considerations of self completely from his memory.

Rose Maylie had rapidly grown worse; before mid-night she was delirious. A medical practitioner, who resided on the spot, was in constant attendance upon her; and after first seeing the patient, he had taken Mrs. Maylie aside, and pronounced her disorder to be one of a most alarming nature. ‘In fact,’ he said, ‘it would be little short of a miracle, if she recovered.’

How often did Oliver start from his bed that night, and stealing out, with noiseless footstep, to the staircase, listen for the slightest sound from the sick chamber! How often did a tremble shake his frame, and cold drops of terror start upon his brow, when a sudden trampling of feet caused him to fear that something too dreadful to think of, had even then occurred! And what had been the fervency of all the prayers he had ever muttered, compared with those he poured forth, now, in the agony and passion of his supplication for the life and health of the gentle creature, who was tottering on the deep grave’s verge!

Oh! the suspense, the fearful, acute suspense, of standing idly by while the life of one we dearly love, is trembling in the balance! Oh! the racking thoughts that crowd upon the mind, and make the heart beat violently, and the breath come thick, by the force of the images they conjure up before it; the desperate anxiety *to be doing something* to relieve the pain, or lessen the danger, which we have no power to alleviate; the sinking of soul and spirit,

which the sad remembrance of our helplessness produces; what tortures can equal these; what reflections or endeavours can, in the full tide and fever of the time, allay them!

Morning came; and the little cottage was lonely and still. People spoke in whispers; anxious faces appeared at the gate, from time to time; women and children went away in tears. All the livelong day, and for hours after it had grown dark, Oliver paced softly up and down the garden, raising his eyes every instant to the sick chamber, and shuddering to see the darkened window, looking as if death lay stretched inside. Late that night, Mr. Losberne arrived. ‘It is hard,’ said the good doctor, turning away as he spoke; ‘so young; so much beloved; but there is very little hope.’

Another morning. The sun shone brightly; as brightly as if it looked upon no misery or care; and, with every leaf and flower in full bloom about her; with life, and health, and sounds and sights of joy, surrounding her on every side: the fair young creature lay, wasting fast. Oliver crept away to the old churchyard, and sitting down on one of the green mounds, wept and prayed for her, in silence.

There was such peace and beauty in the scene; so much of brightness and mirth in the sunny landscape; such blithesome music in the songs of the summer birds; such freedom in the rapid flight of the rook, careering overhead; so much of life and joyousness in all; that, when the boy raised his aching eyes, and looked about, the thought instinctively occurred to him, that this was not a time for death; that Rose could surely never die when humbler things were all so glad and gay; that graves were for cold and cheerless winter: not for sunlight and fragrance. He almost thought that shrouds were for the old and shrunken; and that they never wrapped the young and graceful form in their ghastly folds.

A knell from the church bell broke harshly on these youthful thoughts. Another! Again! It was tolling for the funeral service. A group of humble mourners entered the gate: wearing white favours; for the corpse was young. They stood uncovered by a grave; and there was a mother—a mother once—among the weeping train. But the sun shone brightly, and the birds sang on.

Oliver turned homeward, thinking on the many kindnesses he had received from the young lady, and wishing that the time could come again, that he might never cease showing her how grateful and attached he was.

He had no cause for self-reproach on the score of neglect, or want of thought, for he had been devoted to her service; and yet a hundred little occasions rose up before him, on which he fancied he might have been more zealous, and more earnest, and wished he had been. We need be careful how we deal with those about us, when every death carries to some small circle of survivors, thoughts of so much omitted, and so little done—of so many things forgotten, and so many more which might have been repaired! There is no remorse so deep as that which is unavailing; if we would be spared its tortures, let us remember this, in time.

When he reached home Mrs. Maylie was sitting in the little parlour. Oliver's heart sank at sight of her; for she had never left the bedside of her niece; and he trembled to think what change could have driven her away. He learnt that she had fallen into a deep sleep, from which she would waken, either to recovery and life, or to bid them farewell, and die.

They sat, listening, and afraid to speak, for hours. The untasted meal was removed, with looks which showed that their thoughts were elsewhere, they watched the sun as he sank lower and lower, and, at length, cast over sky and earth those brilliant hues which herald his departure. Their quick ears caught the sound of an approaching footstep. They both involuntarily darted to the door, as Mr. Losberne entered.

'What of Rose?' cried the old lady. 'Tell me at once! I can bear it; anything but suspense! Oh, tell me! in the name of Heaven!'

'You must compose yourself,' said the doctor supporting her. 'Be calm, my dear ma'am, pray.'

'Let me go, in God's name! My dear child! She is dead! She is dying!'

'No!' cried the doctor, passionately. 'As He is good and merciful, she will live to bless us all, for years to come.'

The lady fell upon her knees, and tried to fold her hands together; but the energy which had supported her so long, fled up to Heaven with her first thanksgiving; and she sank into the friendly arms which were extended to receive her.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT WAS ALMOST TOO much happiness to bear. Oliver felt stunned and stupefied by the unexpected intelligence; he could not weep, or speak, or rest. He had scarcely the power of understanding anything that had passed, until, after a long ramble in the quiet evening air, a burst of tears came to his relief, and he seemed to awaken, all at once, to a full sense of the joyful change that had occurred, and the almost insupportable load of anguish which had been taken from his breast.

The night was fast closing in, when he returned homeward: laden with flowers which he had culled, with peculiar care, for the adornment of the sick chamber. As he walked briskly along the road, he heard behind him, the noise of some vehicle, approaching at a furious pace. Looking round, he saw that it was a post-chaise, driven at great speed; and as the horses were galloping, and the road was narrow, he stood leaning against a gate until it should have passed him.

As it dashed on, Oliver caught a glimpse of a man in a white nightcap, whose face seemed familiar to him, although his view was so brief that he could not identify the person. In another second or two, the nightcap was thrust out of the chaise-window, and a stentorian voice bellowed to the driver to stop: which he did, as soon as he could pull up his horses. Then, the nightcap once again appeared: and the same voice called Oliver by his name.

‘Here!’ cried the voice. ‘Oliver, what’s the news? Miss Rose! Master O-li-ver!’

‘Is is you, Giles?’ cried Oliver, running up to the chaise-door.

Giles popped out his nightcap again, preparatory to making some reply, when he was suddenly pulled back by a young gentleman who occupied the other corner of the chaise, and who eagerly demanded what was the news.

‘In a word!’ cried the gentleman, ‘Better or worse?’

‘Better—much better!’ replied Oliver, hastily.

‘Thank Heaven!’ exclaimed the gentleman. ‘You are sure?’

‘Quite, sir,’ replied Oliver. ‘The change took place only a few hours ago; and Mr. Losberne says, that all danger is at an end.’

The gentleman said not another word, but, opening the chaise-door, leaped out, and taking Oliver hurriedly by the arm, led him aside.

‘You are quite certain? There is no possibility of any mistake on your part, my boy, is there?’ demanded the gentleman in a tremulous voice. ‘Do not deceive me, by awakening hopes that are not to be fulfilled.’

‘I would not for the world, sir,’ replied Oliver. ‘Indeed you may believe me. Mr. Losberne’s words were, that she would live to bless us all for many years to come. I heard him say so.’

The tears stood in Oliver’s eyes as he recalled the scene which was the beginning of so much happiness; and the gentleman turned his face away, and remained silent, for some minutes. Oliver thought he heard him sob, more than once; but he feared to interrupt him by any fresh remark—for he could well guess what his feelings were—and so stood apart, feigning to be occupied with his nosegay.

All this time, Mr. Giles, with the white nightcap on, had been sitting on the steps of the chaise, supporting an elbow on each knee, and wiping his eyes with a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief dotted with white spots. That the honest fellow had not been feigning emotion, was abundantly demonstrated by the very red eyes with which he regarded the young gentleman, when he turned round and addressed him.

‘I think you had better go on to my mother’s in the chaise, Giles,’ said he. ‘I would rather walk slowly on, so as to gain a little time before I see her. You can say I am coming.’

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Harry,’ said Giles: giving a final polish to his ruffled countenance with the handkerchief; ‘but if you would leave the postboy to say that, I should be very much obliged to you. It wouldn’t be proper for the maids to see me in this state, sir; I should never have any more authority with them if they did.’

‘Well,’ rejoined Harry Maylie, smiling, ‘you can do as you like. Let him go on with the luggage, if you wish it, and do you follow with us. Only first exchange that nightcap for some more appropriate covering, or we shall be

taken for madmen.’

Mr. Giles, reminded of his unbecoming costume, snatched off and pocketed his nightcap; and substituted a hat, of grave and sober shape, which he took out of the chaise. This done, the postboy drove off; Giles, Mr. Maylie, and Oliver, followed at their leisure.

As they walked along, Oliver glanced from time to time with much interest and curiosity at the new comer. He seemed about five-and-twenty years of age, and was of the middle height; his countenance was frank and handsome; and his demeanor easy and prepossessing. Notwithstanding the difference between youth and age, he bore so strong a likeness to the old lady, that Oliver would have had no great difficulty in imagining their relationship, if he had not already spoken of her as his mother.

Mrs. Maylie was anxiously waiting to receive her son when he reached the cottage. The meeting did not take place without great emotion on both sides.

‘Mother!’ whispered the young man; ‘why did you not write before?’

‘I did,’ replied Mrs. Maylie; ‘but, on reflection, I determined to keep back the letter until I had heard Mr. Losberne’s opinion.’

‘But why,’ said the young man, ‘why run the chance of that occurring which so nearly happened? If Rose had—I cannot utter that word now—if this illness had terminated differently, how could you ever have forgiven yourself! How could I ever have know happiness again!’

‘If that *had* been the case, Harry,’ said Mrs. Maylie, ‘I fear your happiness would have been effectually blighted, and that your arrival here, a day sooner or a day later, would have been of very, very little import.’

‘And who can wonder if it be so, mother?’ rejoined the young man; ‘or why should I say, *if*?—It is—it is—you know it, mother—you must know it!’

‘I know that she deserves the best and purest love the heart of man can offer,’ said Mrs. Maylie; ‘I know that the devotion and affection of her nature require no ordinary return, but one that shall be deep and lasting. If I did not feel this, and know, besides, that a changed behaviour in one she loved would break her heart, I should not feel my task so difficult of performance, or have to encounter so many struggles in my own bosom, when I take what seems to me to be the strict line of duty.’

‘This is unkind, mother,’ said Harry. ‘Do you still suppose that I am a

boy ignorant of my own mind, and mistaking the impulses of my own soul?'

'I think, my dear son,' returned Mrs. Maylie, laying her hand upon his shoulder, 'that youth has many generous impulses which do not last; and that among them are some, which, being gratified, become only the more fleeting. Above all, I think,' said the lady, fixing her eyes on her son's face, 'that if an enthusiastic, ardent, and ambitious man marry a wife on whose name there is a stain, which, though it originate in no fault of hers, may be visited by cold and sordid people upon her, and upon his children also: and, in exact proportion to his success in the world, be cast in his teeth, and made the subject of sneers against him: he may, no matter how generous and good his nature, one day repent of the connection he formed in early life. And she may have the pain of knowing that he does so.'

'Mother,' said the young man, impatiently, 'he would be a selfish brute, unworthy alike of the name of man and of the woman you describe, who acted thus.'

'You think so now, Harry,' replied his mother.

'And ever will!' said the young man. 'The mental agony I have suffered, during the last two days, wrings from me the avowal to you of a passion which, as you well know, is not one of yesterday, nor one I have lightly formed. On Rose, sweet, gentle girl! my heart is set, as firmly as ever heart of man was set on woman. I have no thought, no view, no hope in life, beyond her; and if you oppose me in this great stake, you take my peace and happiness in your hands, and cast them to the wind. Mother, think better of this, and of me, and do not disregard the happiness of which you seem to think so little.'

'Harry,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'it is because I think so much of warm and sensitive hearts, that I would spare them from being wounded. But we have said enough, and more than enough, on this matter, just now.'

'Let it rest with Rose, then,' interposed Harry. 'You will not press these overstrained opinions of yours, so far, as to throw any obstacle in my way?'

'I will not,' rejoined Mrs. Maylie; 'but I would have you consider—'

'I *have* considered!' was the impatient reply; 'Mother, I have considered, years and years. I have considered, ever since I have been capable of serious reflection. My feelings remain unchanged, as they ever will; and why should I suffer the pain of a delay in giving them vent, which can be

productive of no earthly good? No! Before I leave this place, Rose shall hear me.’

‘She shall,’ said Mrs. Maylie.

‘There is something in your manner, which would almost imply that she will hear me coldly, mother,’ said the young man.

‘Not coldly,’ rejoined the old lady; ‘far from it.’

‘How then?’ urged the young man. ‘She has formed no other attachment?’

‘No, indeed,’ replied his mother; ‘you have, or I mistake, too strong a hold on her affections already. What I would say,’ resumed the old lady, stopping her son as he was about to speak, ‘is this. Before you stake your all on this chance; before you suffer yourself to be carried to the highest point of hope; reflect for a few moments, my dear child, on Rose’s history, and consider what effect the knowledge of her doubtful birth may have on her decision: devoted as she is to us, with all the intensity of her noble mind, and with that perfect sacrifice of self which, in all matters, great or trifling, has always been her characteristic.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘That I leave you to discover,’ replied Mrs. Maylie. ‘I must go back to her. God bless you!’

‘I shall see you again to-night?’ said the young man, eagerly.

‘By and by,’ replied the lady; ‘when I leave Rose.’

‘You will tell her I am here?’ said Harry.

‘Of course,’ replied Mrs. Maylie.

‘And say how anxious I have been, and how much I have suffered, and how I long to see her. You will not refuse to do this, mother?’

‘No,’ said the old lady; ‘I will tell her all.’ And pressing her son’s hand, affectionately, she hastened from the room.

Mr. Losberne and Oliver had remained at another end of the apartment while this hurried conversation was proceeding. The former now held out his hand to Harry Maylie; and hearty salutations were exchanged between them. The doctor then communicated, in reply to multifarious questions from his young friend, a precise account of his patient’s situation; which was quite as consolatory and full of promise, as Oliver’s statement had encouraged him to hope; and to the whole of which, Mr. Giles, who affected to be busy about the luggage, listened with greedy ears.

‘Have you shot anything particular, lately, Giles?’ inquired the doctor, when he had concluded.

‘Nothing particular, sir,’ replied Mr. Giles, colouring up to the eyes.

‘Nor catching any thieves, nor identifying any house-breakers?’ said the doctor.

‘None at all, sir,’ replied Mr. Giles, with much gravity.

‘Well,’ said the doctor, ‘I am sorry to hear it, because you do that sort of thing admirably. Pray, how is Brittles?’

‘The boy is very well, sir,’ said Mr. Giles, recovering his usual tone of patronage; ‘and sends his respectful duty, sir.’

‘That’s well,’ said the doctor. ‘Seeing you here, reminds me, Mr. Giles, that on the day before that on which I was called away so hurriedly, I executed, at the request of your good mistress, a small commission in your favour. Just step into this corner a moment, will you?’

Mr. Giles walked into the corner with much importance, and some wonder, and was honoured with a short whispering conference with the doctor, on the termination of which, he made a great many bows, and retired with steps of unusual stateliness. The subject matter of this conference was not disclosed in the parlour, but the kitchen was speedily enlightened concerning it; for Mr. Giles walked straight thither, and having called for a mug of ale, announced, with an air of majesty, which was highly effective, that it had pleased his mistress, in consideration of his gallant behaviour on the occasion of that attempted robbery, to deposit, in the local savings-bank, the sum of five-and-twenty pounds, for his sole use and benefit. At this, the two women-servants lifted up their hands and eyes, and supposed that Mr. Giles, pulling out his shirt-frill, replied, ‘No, no’; and that if they observed that he was at all haughty to his inferiors, he would thank them to tell him so. And then he made a great many other remarks, no less illustrative of his humility, which were received with equal favour and applause, and were, withal, as original and as much to the purpose, as the remarks of great men commonly are.

Above stairs, the remainder of the evening passed cheerfully away; for the doctor was in high spirits; and however fatigued or thoughtful Harry Maylie might have been at first, he was not proof against the worthy gentleman’s good humour, which displayed itself in a great variety of sallies and professional recollections, and an abundance of small jokes, which

struck Oliver as being the drollest things he had ever heard, and caused him to laugh proportionately; to the evident satisfaction of the doctor, who laughed immoderately at himself, and made Harry laugh almost as heartily, by the very force of sympathy. So, they were as pleasant a party as, under the circumstances, they could well have been; and it was late before they retired, with light and thankful hearts, to take that rest of which, after the doubt and suspense they had recently undergone, they stood much in need.

Oliver rose next morning, in better heart, and went about his usual occupations, with more hope and pleasure than he had known for many days. The birds were once more hung out, to sing, in their old places; and the sweetest wild flowers that could be found, were once more gathered to gladden Rose with their beauty. The melancholy which had seemed to the sad eyes of the anxious boy to hang, for days past, over every object, beautiful as all were, was dispelled by magic. The dew seemed to sparkle more brightly on the green leaves; the air to rustle among them with a sweeter music; and the sky itself to look more blue and bright. Such is the influence which the condition of our own thoughts, exercise, even over the appearance of external objects. Men who look on nature, and their fellow-men, and cry that all is dark and gloomy, are in the right; but the sombre colours are reflections from their own jaundiced eyes and hearts. The real hues are delicate, and need a clearer vision.

It is worthy of remark, and Oliver did not fail to note it at the time, that his morning expeditions were no longer made alone. Harry Maylie, after the very first morning when he met Oliver coming laden home, was seized with such a passion for flowers, and displayed such a taste in their arrangement, as left his young companion far behind. If Oliver were behindhand in these respects, he knew where the best were to be found; and morning after morning they scoured the country together, and brought home the fairest that blossomed. The window of the young lady’s chamber was opened now; for she loved to feel the rich summer air stream in, and revive her with its freshness; but there always stood in water, just inside the lattice, one particular little bunch, which was made up with great care, every morning. Oliver could not help noticing that the withered flowers were never thrown away, although the little vase was regularly replenished; nor, could he help observing, that whenever the doctor came into the garden, he invariably cast his eyes up to that particular corner, and nodded his head most expressively,

as he set forth on his morning's walk. Pending these observations, the days were flying by; and Rose was rapidly recovering.

Nor did Oliver's time hang heavy on his hands, although the young lady had not yet left her chamber, and there were no evening walks, save now and then, for a short distance, with Mrs. Maylie. He applied himself, with redoubled assiduity, to the instructions of the white-headed old gentleman, and laboured so hard that his quick progress surprised even himself. It was while he was engaged in this pursuit, that he was greatly startled and distressed by a most unexpected occurrence.

The little room in which he was accustomed to sit, when busy at his books, was on the ground-floor, at the back of the house. It was quite a cottage-room, with a lattice-window: around which were clusters of jessamine and honeysuckle, that crept over the casement, and filled the place with their delicious perfume. It looked into a garden, whence a wicket-gate opened into a small paddock; all beyond, was fine meadow-land and wood. There was no other dwelling near, in that direction; and the prospect it commanded was very extensive.

One beautiful evening, when the first shades of twilight were beginning to settle upon the earth, Oliver sat at this window, intent upon his books. He had been poring over them for some time; and, as the day had been uncommonly sultry, and he had exerted himself a great deal, it is no disparagement to the authors, whoever they may have been, to say, that gradually and by slow degrees, he fell asleep.

There is a kind of sleep that steals upon us sometimes, which, while it holds the body prisoner, does not free the mind from a sense of things about it, and enable it to ramble at its pleasure. So far as an overpowering heaviness, a prostration of strength, and an utter inability to control our thoughts or power of motion, can be called sleep, this is it; and yet, we have a consciousness of all that is going on about us, and, if we dream at such a time, words which are really spoken, or sounds which really exist at the moment, accommodate themselves with surprising readiness to our visions, until reality and imagination become so strangely blended that it is afterwards almost matter of impossibility to separate the two. Nor is this, the most striking phenomenon incidental to such a state. It is an undoubted fact, that although our senses of touch and sight be for the time dead, yet our sleeping thoughts, and the visionary scenes that pass before us, will be

influenced and materially influenced, by the *mere silent presence* of some external object; which may not have been near us when we closed our eyes: and of whose vicinity we have had no waking consciousness.

Oliver knew, perfectly well, that he was in his own little room; that his books were lying on the table before him; that the sweet air was stirring among the creeping plants outside. And yet he was asleep. Suddenly, the scene changed; the air became close and confined; and he thought, with a glow of terror, that he was in the Jew's house again. There sat the hideous old man, in his accustomed corner, pointing at him, and whispering to another man, with his face averted, who sat beside him.

'Hush, my dear!' he thought he heard the Jew say; 'it is he, sure enough. Come away.'

'He!' the other man seemed to answer; 'could I mistake him, think you? If a crowd of ghosts were to put themselves into his exact shape, and he stood amongst them, there is something that would tell me how to point him out. If you buried him fifty feet deep, and took me across his grave, I fancy I should know, if there wasn't a mark above it, that he lay buried there?'

The man seemed to say this, with such dreadful hatred, that Oliver awoke with the fear, and started up.

Good Heaven! what was that, which sent the blood tingling to his heart, and deprived him of his voice, and of power to move! There—there—at the window—close before him—so close, that he could have almost touched him before he started back: with his eyes peering into the room, and meeting his: there stood the Jew! And beside him, white with rage or fear, or both, were the scowling features of the man who had accosted him in the inn-yard.

It was but an instant, a glance, a flash, before his eyes; and they were gone. But they had recognised him, and he them; and their look was as firmly impressed upon his memory, as if it had been deeply carved in stone, and set before him from his birth. He stood transfixed for a moment; then, leaping from the window into the garden, called loudly for help.

CHAPTER XXXV

WHEN THE INMATES OF the house, attracted by Oliver's cries, hurried to the spot from which they proceeded, they found him, pale and agitated, pointing in the direction of the meadows behind the house, and scarcely able to articulate the words, 'The Jew! the Jew!'

Mr. Giles was at a loss to comprehend what this outcry meant; but Harry Maylie, whose perceptions were something quicker, and who had heard Oliver's history from his mother, understood it at once.

'What direction did he take?' he asked, catching up a heavy stick which was standing in a corner.

'That,' replied Oliver, pointing out the course the man had taken; 'I missed them in an instant.'

'Then, they are in the ditch!' said Harry. 'Follow! And keep as near me, as you can.' So saying, he sprang over the hedge, and darted off with a speed which rendered it matter of exceeding difficulty for the others to keep near him.

Giles followed as well as he could; and Oliver followed too; and in the course of a minute or two, Mr. Losberne, who had been out walking, and just then returned, tumbled over the hedge after them, and picking himself up with more agility than he could have been supposed to possess, struck into the same course at no contemptible speed, shouting all the while, most prodigiously, to know what was the matter.

On they all went; nor stopped they once to breathe, until the leader, striking off into an angle of the field indicated by Oliver, began to search, narrowly, the ditch and hedge adjoining; which afforded time for the remainder of the party to come up; and for Oliver to communicate to Mr. Losberne the circumstances that had led to so vigorous a pursuit.

The search was all in vain. There were not even the traces of recent

footsteps, to be seen. They stood now, on the summit of a little hill, commanding the open fields in every direction for three or four miles. There was the village in the hollow on the left; but, in order to gain that, after pursuing the track Oliver had pointed out, the men must have made a circuit of open ground, which it was impossible they could have accomplished in so short a time. A thick wood skirted the meadow-land in another direction; but they could not have gained that covert for the same reason.

‘It must have been a dream, Oliver,’ said Harry Maylie.

‘Oh no, indeed, sir,’ replied Oliver, shuddering at the very recollection of the old wretch’s countenance; ‘I saw him too plainly for that. I saw them both, as plainly as I see you now.’

‘Who was the other?’ inquired Harry and Mr. Losberne, together.

‘The very same man I told you of, who came so suddenly upon me at the inn,’ said Oliver. ‘We had our eyes fixed full upon each other; and I could swear to him.’

‘They took this way?’ demanded Harry: ‘are you sure?’

‘As I am that the men were at the window,’ replied Oliver, pointing down, as he spoke, to the hedge which divided the cottage-garden from the meadow. ‘The tall man leaped over, just there; and the Jew, running a few paces to the right, crept through that gap.’

The two gentlemen watched Oliver’s earnest face, as he spoke, and looking from him to each other, seemed to feel satisfied of the accuracy of what he said. Still, in no direction were there any appearances of the trampling of men in hurried flight. The grass was long; but it was trodden down nowhere, save where their own feet had crushed it. The sides and brinks of the ditches were of damp clay; but in no one place could they discern the print of men’s shoes, or the slightest mark which would indicate that any feet had pressed the ground for hours before.

‘This is strange!’ said Harry.

‘Strange?’ echoed the doctor. ‘Blathers and Duff, themselves, could make nothing of it.’

Notwithstanding the evidently useless nature of their search, they did not desist until the coming on of night rendered its further prosecution hopeless; and even then, they gave it up with reluctance. Giles was dispatched to the different ale-houses in the village, furnished with the best description Oliver

could give of the appearance and dress of the strangers. Of these, the Jew was, at all events, sufficiently remarkable to be remembered, supposing he had been seen drinking, or loitering about; but Giles returned without any intelligence, calculated to dispel or lessen the mystery.

On the next day, fresh search was made, and the inquiries renewed; but with no better success. On the day following, Oliver and Mr. Maylie repaired to the market-town, in the hope of seeing or hearing something of the men there; but this effort was equally fruitless. After a few days, the affair began to be forgotten, as most affairs are, when wonder, having no fresh food to support it, dies away of itself.

Meanwhile, Rose was rapidly recovering. She had left her room: was able to go out; and mixing once more with the family, carried joy into the hearts of all.

But, although this happy change had a visible effect on the little circle; and although cheerful voices and merry laughter were once more heard in the cottage; there was at times, an unwonted restraint upon some there: even upon Rose herself: which Oliver could not fail to remark. Mrs. Maylie and her son were often closeted together for a long time; and more than once Rose appeared with traces of tears upon her face. After Mr. Losberne had fixed a day for his departure to Chertsey, these symptoms increased; and it became evident that something was in progress which affected the peace of the young lady, and of somebody else besides.

At length, one morning, when Rose was alone in the breakfast-parlour, Harry Maylie entered; and, with some hesitation, begged permission to speak with her for a few moments.

‘A few—a very few—will suffice, Rose,’ said the young man, drawing his chair towards her. ‘What I shall have to say, has already presented itself to your mind; the most cherished hopes of my heart are not unknown to you, though from my lips you have not heard them stated.’

Rose had been very pale from the moment of his entrance; but that might have been the effect of her recent illness. She merely bowed; and bending over some plants that stood near, waited in silence for him to proceed.

‘I—I—ought to have left here, before,’ said Harry.

‘You should, indeed,’ replied Rose. ‘Forgive me for saying so, but I wish you had.’

‘I was brought here, by the most dreadful and agonising of all

apprehensions,’ said the young man; ‘the fear of losing the one dear being on whom my every wish and hope are fixed. You had been dying; trembling between earth and heaven. We know that when the young, the beautiful, and good, are visited with sickness, their pure spirits insensibly turn towards their bright home of lasting rest; we know, Heaven help us! that the best and fairest of our kind, too often fade in blooming.’

There were tears in the eyes of the gentle girl, as these words were spoken; and when one fell upon the flower over which she bent, and glistened brightly in its cup, making it more beautiful, it seemed as though the outpouring of her fresh young heart, claimed kindred naturally, with the loveliest things in nature.

‘A creature,’ continued the young man, passionately, ‘a creature as fair and innocent of guile as one of God’s own angels, fluttered between life and death. Oh! who could hope, when the distant world to which she was akin, half opened to her view, that she would return to the sorrow and calamity of this! Rose, Rose, to know that you were passing away like some soft shadow, which a light from above, casts upon the earth; to have no hope that you would be spared to those who linger here; hardly to know a reason why you should be; to feel that you belonged to that bright sphere whither so many of the fairest and the best have winged their early flight; and yet to pray, amid all these consolations, that you might be restored to those who loved you—these were distractions almost too great to bear. They were mine, by day and night; and with them, came such a rushing torrent of fears, and apprehensions, and selfish regrets, lest you should die, and never know how devotedly I loved you, as almost bore down sense and reason in its course. You recovered. Day by day, and almost hour by hour, some drop of health came back, and mingling with the spent and feeble stream of life which circulated languidly within you, swelled it again to a high and rushing tide. I have watched you change almost from death, to life, with eyes that turned blind with their eagerness and deep affection. Do not tell me that you wish I had lost this; for it has softened my heart to all mankind.’

‘I did not mean that,’ said Rose, weeping; ‘I only wish you had left here, that you might have turned to high and noble pursuits again; to pursuits well worthy of you.’

‘There is no pursuit more worthy of me: more worthy of the highest

nature that exists: than the struggle to win such a heart as yours,' said the young man, taking her hand. 'Rose, my own dear Rose! For years—for years—I have loved you; hoping to win my way to fame, and then come proudly home and tell you it had been pursued only for you to share; thinking, in my daydreams, how I would remind you, in that happy moment, of the many silent tokens I had given of a boy's attachment, and claim your hand, as in redemption of some old mute contract that had been sealed between us! That time has not arrived; but here, with not fame won, and no young vision realised, I offer you the heart so long your own, and stake my all upon the words with which you greet the offer.'

'Your behaviour has ever been kind and noble.' said Rose, mastering the emotions by which she was agitated. 'As you believe that I am not insensible or ungrateful, so hear my answer.'

'It is, that I may endeavour to deserve you; it is, dear Rose?'

'It is,' replied Rose, 'that you must endeavour to forget me; not as your old and dearly-attached companion, for that would wound me deeply; but, as the object of your love. Look into the world; think how many hearts you would be proud to gain, are there. Confide some other passion to me, if you will; I will be the truest, warmest, and most faithful friend you have.'

There was a pause, during which, Rose, who had covered her face with one hand, gave free vent to her tears. Harry still retained the other.

'And your reasons, Rose,' he said, at length, in a low voice; 'your reasons for this decision?'

'You have a right to know them,' rejoined Rose. 'You can say nothing to alter my resolution. It is a duty that I must perform. I owe it, alike to others, and to myself.'

'To yourself?'

'Yes, Harry. I owe it to myself, that I, a friendless, portionless, girl, with a blight upon my name, should not give your friends reason to suspect that I had sordidly yielded to your first passion, and fastened myself, a clog, on all your hopes and projects. I owe it to you and yours, to prevent you from opposing, in the warmth of your generous nature, this great obstacle to your progress in the world.'

'If your inclinations chime with your sense of duty—' Harry began.

'They do not,' replied Rose, colouring deeply.

'Then you return my love?' said Harry. 'Say but that, dear Rose; say but

that; and soften the bitterness of this hard disappointment!'

'If I could have done so, without doing heavy wrong to him I loved,' rejoined Rose, 'I could have—'

'Have received this declaration very differently?' said Harry. 'Do not conceal that from me, at least, Rose.'

'I could,' said Rose. 'Stay!' she added, disengaging her hand, 'why should we prolong this painful interview? Most painful to me, and yet productive of lasting happiness, notwithstanding; for it *will* be happiness to know that I once held the high place in your regard which I now occupy, and every triumph you achieve in life will animate me with new fortitude and firmness. Farewell, Harry! As we have met to-day, we meet no more; but in other relations than those in which this conversation have placed us, we may be long and happily entwined; and may every blessing that the prayers of a true and earnest heart can call down from the source of all truth and sincerity, cheer and prosper you!'

'Another word, Rose,' said Harry. 'Your reason in your own words. From your own lips, let me hear it!'

'The prospect before you,' answered Rose, firmly, 'is a brilliant one. All the honours to which great talents and powerful connections can help men in public life, are in store for you. But those connections are proud; and I will neither mingle with such as may hold in scorn the mother who gave me life; nor bring disgrace or failure on the son of her who has so well supplied that mother's place. In a word,' said the young lady, turning away, as her temporary firmness forsook her, 'there is a stain upon my name, which the world visits on innocent heads. I will carry it into no blood but my own; and the reproach shall rest alone on me.'

'One word more, Rose. Dearest Rose! one more!' cried Harry, throwing himself before her. 'If I had been less—less fortunate, the world would call it—if some obscure and peaceful life had been my destiny—if I had been poor, sick, helpless—would you have turned from me then? Or has my probable advancement to riches and honour, given this scruple birth?'

'Do not press me to reply,' answered Rose. 'The question does not arise, and never will. It is unfair, almost unkind, to urge it.'

'If your answer be what I almost dare to hope it is,' retorted Harry, 'it will shed a gleam of happiness upon my lonely way, and light the path before me. It is not an idle thing to do so much, by the utterance of a few

brief words, for one who loves you beyond all else. Oh, Rose: in the name of my ardent and enduring attachment; in the name of all I have suffered for you, and all you doom me to undergo; answer me this one question!'

'Then, if your lot had been differently cast,' rejoined Rose; 'if you had been even a little, but not so far, above me; if I could have been a help and comfort to you in any humble scene of peace and retirement, and not a blot and drawback in ambitious and distinguished crowds; I should have been spared this trial. I have every reason to be happy, very happy, now; but then, Harry, I own I should have been happier.'

Busy recollections of old hopes, cherished as a girl, long ago, crowded into the mind of Rose, while making this avowal; but they brought tears with them, as old hopes will when they come back withered; and they relieved her.

'I cannot help this weakness, and it makes my purpose stronger,' said Rose, extending her hand. 'I must leave you now, indeed.'

'I ask one promise,' said Harry. 'Once, and only once more,—say within a year, but it may be much sooner,—I may speak to you again on this subject, for the last time.'

'Not to press me to alter my right determination,' replied Rose, with a melancholy smile; 'it will be useless.'

'No,' said Harry; 'to hear you repeat it, if you will—finally repeat it! I will lay at your feet, whatever of station of fortune I may possess; and if you still adhere to your present resolution, will not seek, by word or act, to change it.'

'Then let it be so,' rejoined Rose; 'it is but one pang the more, and by that time I may be enabled to bear it better.'

She extended her hand again. But the young man caught her to his bosom; and imprinting one kiss on her beautiful forehead, hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI

‘AND SO YOU ARE resolved to be my travelling companion this morning; eh?’ said the doctor, as Harry Maylie joined him and Oliver at the breakfast-table. ‘Why, you are not in the same mind or intention two half-hours together!’

‘You will tell me a different tale one of these days,’ said Harry, colouring without any perceptible reason.

‘I hope I may have good cause to do so,’ replied Mr. Losberne; ‘though I confess I don’t think I shall. But yesterday morning you had made up your mind, in a great hurry, to stay here, and to accompany your mother, like a dutiful son, to the sea-side. Before noon, you announce that you are going to do me the honour of accompanying me as far as I go, on your road to London. And at night, you urge me, with great mystery, to start before the ladies are stirring; the consequence of which is, that young Oliver here is pinned down to his breakfast when he ought to be ranging the meadows after botanical phenomena of all kinds. Too bad, isn’t it, Oliver?’

‘I should have been very sorry not to have been at home when you and Mr. Maylie went away, sir,’ rejoined Oliver.

‘That’s a fine fellow,’ said the doctor; ‘you shall come and see me when you return. But, to speak seriously, Harry; has any communication from the great nobs produced this sudden anxiety on your part to be gone?’

‘The great nobs,’ replied Harry, ‘under which designation, I presume, you include my most stately uncle, have not communicated with me at all, since I have been here; nor, at this time of the year, is it likely that anything would occur to render necessary my immediate attendance among them.’

‘Well,’ said the doctor, ‘you are a queer fellow. But of course they will get you into parliament at the election before Christmas, and these sudden shiftings and changes are no bad preparation for political life. There’s

something in that. Good training is always desirable, whether the race be for place, cup, or sweepstakes.'

Harry Maylie looked as if he could have followed up this short dialogue by one or two remarks that would have staggered the doctor not a little; but he contented himself with saying, 'We shall see,' and pursued the subject no farther. The post-chaise drove up to the door shortly afterwards; and Giles coming in for the luggage, the good doctor bustled out, to see it packed.

'Oliver,' said Harry Maylie, in a low voice, 'let me speak a word with you.'

Oliver walked into the window-recess to which Mr. Maylie beckoned him; much surprised at the mixture of sadness and boisterous spirits, which his whole behaviour displayed.

'You can write well now?' said Harry, laying his hand upon his arm.

'I hope so, sir,' replied Oliver.

'I shall not be at home again, perhaps for some time; I wish you would write to me—say once a fort-night: every alternate Monday: to the General Post Office in London. Will you?'

'Oh! certainly, sir; I shall be proud to do it,' exclaimed Oliver, greatly delighted with the commission.

'I should like to know how—how my mother and Miss Maylie are,' said the young man; 'and you can fill up a sheet by telling me what walks you take, and what you talk about, and whether she—they, I mean—seem happy and quite well. You understand me?'

'Oh! quite, sir, quite,' replied Oliver.

'I would rather you did not mention it to them,' said Harry, hurrying over his words; 'because it might make my mother anxious to write to me oftener, and it is a trouble and worry to her. Let it be a secret between you and me; and mind you tell me everything! I depend upon you.'

Oliver, quite elated and honoured by a sense of his importance, faithfully promised to be secret and explicit in his communications. Mr. Maylie took leave of him, with many assurances of his regard and protection.

The doctor was in the chaise; Giles (who, it had been arranged, should be left behind) held the door open in his hand; and the women-servants were in the garden, looking on. Harry cast one slight glance at the latticed window, and jumped into the carriage.

'Drive on!' he cried, 'hard, fast, full gallop! Nothing short of flying will

keep pace with me, to-day.’

‘Halloa!’ cried the doctor, letting down the front glass in a great hurry, and shouting to the postillion; ‘something very short of flying will keep pace with *me*. Do you hear?’

Jingling and clattering, till distance rendered its noise inaudible, and its rapid progress only perceptible to the eye, the vehicle wound its way along the road, almost hidden in a cloud of dust: now wholly disappearing, and now becoming visible again, as intervening objects, or the intricacies of the way, permitted. It was not until even the dusty cloud was no longer to be seen, that the gazers dispersed.

And there was one looker-on, who remained with eyes fixed upon the spot where the carriage had disappeared, long after it was many miles away; for, behind the white curtain which had shrouded her from view when Harry raised his eyes towards the window, sat Rose herself.

‘He seems in high spirits and happy,’ she said, at length. ‘I feared for a time he might be otherwise. I was mistaken. I am very, very glad.’

Tears are signs of gladness as well as grief; but those which coursed down Rose’s face, as she sat pensively at the window, still gazing in the same direction, seemed to tell more of sorrow than of joy.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MR. BUMBLE SAT IN the workhouse parlour, with his eyes moodily fixed on the cheerless grate, whence, as it was summer time, no brighter gleam proceeded, than the reflection of certain sickly rays of the sun, which were sent back from its cold and shining surface. A paper fly-cage dangled from the ceiling, to which he occasionally raised his eyes in gloomy thought; and, as the heedless insects hovered round the gaudy net-work, Mr. Bumble would heave a deep sigh, while a more gloomy shadow overspread his countenance. Mr. Bumble was meditating; it might be that the insects brought to mind, some painful passage in his own past life.

Nor was Mr. Bumble's gloom the only thing calculated to awaken a pleasing melancholy in the bosom of a spectator. There were not wanting other appearances, and those closely connected with his own person, which announced that a great change had taken place in the position of his affairs. The laced coat, and the cocked hat; where were they? He still wore knee-breeches, and dark cotton stockings on his nether limbs; but they were not *the* breeches. The coat was wide-skirted; and in that respect like *the* coat, but, oh how different! The mighty cocked hat was replaced by a modest round one. Mr. Bumble was no longer a beadle.

There are some promotions in life, which, independent of the more substantial rewards they offer, require peculiar value and dignity from the coats and waistcoats connected with them. A field-marshal has his uniform; a bishop his silk apron; a counsellor his silk gown; a beadle his cocked hat. Strip the bishop of his apron, or the beadle of his hat and lace; what are they? Men. Mere men. Dignity, and even holiness too, sometimes, are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some people imagine.

Mr. Bumble had married Mrs. Corney, and was master of the workhouse. Another beadle had come into power. On him the cocked hat, gold-laced

coat, and staff, had all three descended.

‘And to-morrow two months it was done!’ said Mr. Bumble, with a sigh. ‘It seems a age.’

Mr. Bumble might have meant that he had concentrated a whole existence of happiness into the short space of eight weeks; but the sigh—there was a vast deal of meaning in the sigh.

‘I sold myself,’ said Mr. Bumble, pursuing the same train of relection, ‘for six teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a milk-pot; with a small quantity of second-hand furniture, and twenty pound in money. I went very reasonable. Cheap, dirt cheap!’

‘Cheap!’ cried a shrill voice in Mr. Bumble’s ear: ‘you would have been dear at any price; and dear enough I paid for you, Lord above knows that!’

Mr. Bumble turned, and encountered the face of his interesting consort, who, imperfectly comprehending the few words she had overheard of his complaint, had hazarded the foregoing remark at a venture.

‘Mrs. Bumble, ma’am!’ said Mr. Bumble, with a sentimental sternness.

‘Well!’ cried the lady.

‘Have the goodness to look at me,’ said Mr. Bumble, fixing his eyes upon her. (If she stands such a eye as that,’ said Mr. Bumble to himself, ‘she can stand anything. It is a eye I never knew to fail with paupers. If it fails with her, my power is gone.’)

Whether an exceedingly small expansion of eye be sufficient to quell paupers, who, being lightly fed, are in no very high condition; or whether the late Mrs. Corney was particularly proof against eagle glances; are matters of opinion. The matter of fact, is, that the matron was in no way overpowered by Mr. Bumble’s scowl, but, on the contrary, treated it with great disdain, and even raised a laugh thereat, which sounded as though it were genuine.

On hearing this most unexpected sound, Mr. Bumble looked, first incredulous, and afterwards amazed. He then relapsed into his former state; nor did he rouse himself until his attention was again awakened by the voice of his partner.

‘Are you going to sit snoring there, all day?’ inquired Mrs. Bumble.

‘I am going to sit here, as long as I think proper, ma’am,’ rejoined Mr. Bumble; ‘and although I was *not* snoring, I shall snore, gape, sneeze, laugh, or cry, as the humour strikes me; such being my prerogative.’

‘*Your* prerogative!’ sneered Mrs. Bumble, with ineffable contempt.

‘I said the word, ma’am,’ said Mr. Bumble. ‘The prerogative of a man is to command.’

‘And what’s the prerogative of a woman, in the name of Goodness?’ cried the relict of Mr. Corney deceased.

‘To obey, ma’am,’ thundered Mr. Bumble. ‘Your late unfortunate husband should have taught it you; and then, perhaps, he might have been alive now. I wish he was, poor man!’

Mrs. Bumble, seeing at a glance, that the decisive moment had now arrived, and that a blow struck for the mastership on one side or other, must necessarily be final and conclusive, no sooner heard this allusion to the dead and gone, than she dropped into a chair, and with a loud scream that Mr. Bumble was a hard-hearted brute, fell into a paroxysm of tears.

But, tears were not the things to find their way to Mr. Bumble’s soul; his heart was waterproof. Like washable beaver hats that improve with rain, his nerves were rendered stouter and more vigorous, by showers of tears, which, being tokens of weakness, and so far tacit admissions of his own power, pleased and exalted him. He eyed his good lady with looks of great satisfaction, and begged, in an encouraging manner, that she should cry her hardest: the exercise being looked upon, by the faculty, as strongly conducive to health.

‘It opens the lungs, washes the countenance, exercises the eyes, and softens down the temper,’ said Mr. Bumble. ‘So cry away.’

As he discharged himself of this pleasantry, Mr. Bumble took his hat from a peg, and putting it on, rather rakishly, on one side, as a man might, who felt he had asserted his superiority in a becoming manner, thrust his hands into his pockets, and sauntered towards the door, with much ease and waggishness depicted in his whole appearance.

Now, Mrs. Corney that was, had tried the tears, because they were less troublesome than a manual assault; but, she was quite prepared to make trial of the latter mode of proceeding, as Mr. Bumble was not long in discovering.

The first proof he experienced of the fact, was conveyed in a hollow sound, immediately succeeded by the sudden flying off of his hat to the opposite end of the room. This preliminary proceeding laying bare his head, the expert lady, clasping him tightly round the throat with one hand,

inflicted a shower of blows (dealt with singular vigour and dexterity) upon it with the other. This done, she created a little variety by scratching his face, and tearing his hair; and, having, by this time, inflicted as much punishment as she deemed necessary for the offence, she pushed him over a chair, which was luckily well situated for the purpose: and defied him to talk about his prerogative again, if he dared.

‘Get up!’ said Mrs. Bumble, in a voice of command. ‘And take yourself away from here, unless you want me to do something desperate.’

Mr. Bumble rose with a very rueful countenance: wondering much what something desperate might be. Picking up his hat, he looked towards the door.

‘Are you going?’ demanded Mrs. Bumble.

‘Certainly, my dear, certainly,’ rejoined Mr. Bumble, making a quicker motion towards the door. ‘I didn’t intend to—I’m going, my dear! You are so very violent, that really I—’

At this instant, Mrs. Bumble stepped hastily forward to replace the carpet, which had been kicked up in the scuffle. Mr. Bumble immediately darted out of the room, without bestowing another thought on his unfinished sentence: leaving the late Mrs. Corney in full possession of the field.

Mr. Bumble was fairly taken by surprise, and fairly beaten. He had a decided propensity for bullying: derived no inconsiderable pleasure from the exercise of petty cruelty; and, consequently, was (it is needless to say) a coward. This is by no means a disparagement to his character; for many official personages, who are held in high respect and admiration, are the victims of similar infirmities. The remark is made, indeed, rather in his favour than otherwise, and with a view of impressing the reader with a just sense of his qualifications for office.

But, the measure of his degradation was not yet full. After making a tour of the house, and thinking, for the first time, that the poor-laws really were too hard on people; and that men who ran away from their wives, leaving them chargeable to the parish, ought, in justice to be visited with no punishment at all, but rather rewarded as meritorious individuals who had suffered much; Mr. Bumble came to a room where some of the female paupers were usually employed in washing the parish linen: when the sound of voices in conversation, now proceeded.

‘Hem!’ said Mr. Bumble, summoning up all his native dignity. ‘These women at least shall continue to respect the prerogative. Hallo! hallo there! What do you mean by this noise, you hussies?’

With these words, Mr. Bumble opened the door, and walked in with a very fierce and angry manner: which was at once exchanged for a most humiliated and cowering air, as his eyes unexpectedly rested on the form of his lady wife.

‘My dear,’ said Mr. Bumble, ‘I didn’t know you were here.’

‘Didn’t know I was here!’ repeated Mrs. Bumble. ‘What do *you* do here?’

‘I thought they were talking rather too much to be doing their work properly, my dear,’ replied Mr. Bumble: glancing distractedly at a couple of old women at the wash-tub, who were comparing notes of admiration at the workhouse-master’s humility.

‘*You* thought they were talking too much?’ said Mrs. Bumble. ‘What business is it of yours?’

‘Why, my dear—’ urged Mr. Bumble submissively.

‘What business is it of yours?’ demanded Mrs. Bumble, again.

‘It’s very true, you’re matron here, my dear,’ submitted Mr. Bumble; ‘but I thought you mightn’t be in the way just then.’

‘I’ll tell you what, Mr. Bumble,’ returned his lady. ‘We don’t want any of your interference. You’re a great deal too fond of poking your nose into things that don’t concern you, making everybody in the house laugh, the moment your back is turned, and making yourself look like a fool every hour in the day. Be off; come!’

Mr. Bumble, seeing with excruciating feelings, the delight of the two old paupers, who were tittering together most rapturously, hesitated for an instant. Mrs. Bumble, whose patience brooked no delay, caught up a bowl of soap-suds, and motioning him towards the door, ordered him instantly to depart, on pain of receiving the contents upon his portly person.

What could Mr. Bumble do? He looked dejectedly round, and slunk away; and, as he reached the door, the titterings of the paupers broke into a shrill chuckle of irrepressible delight. It wanted but this. He was degraded in their eyes; he had lost caste and station before the very paupers; he had fallen from all the height and pomp of beadleship, to the lowest depth of the most snubbed hen-peckery.

‘All in two months!’ said Mr. Bumble, filled with dismal thoughts. ‘Two months! No more than two months ago, I was not only my own master, but everybody else’s, so far as the porochial workhouse was concerned, and now!—’

It was too much. Mr. Bumble boxed the ears of the boy who opened the gate for him (for he had reached the portal in his reverie); and walked, distractedly, into the street.

He walked up one street, and down another, until exercise had abated the first passion of his grief; and then the revulsion of feeling made him thirsty. He passed a great many public-houses; but, at length paused before one in a by-way, whose parlour, as he gathered from a hasty peep over the blinds, was deserted, save by one solitary customer. It began to rain, heavily, at the moment. This determined him. Mr. Bumble stepped in; and ordering something to drink, as he passed the bar, entered the apartment into which he had looked from the street.

The man who was seated there, was tall and dark, and wore a large cloak. He had the air of a stranger; and seemed, by a certain haggardness in his look, as well as by the dusty soils on his dress, to have travelled some distance. He eyed Bumble askance, as he entered, but scarcely deigned to nod his head in acknowledgment of his salutation.

Mr. Bumble had quite dignity enough for two; supposing even that the stranger had been more familiar: so he drank his gin-and-water in silence, and read the paper with great show of pomp and circumstance.

It so happened, however: as it will happen very often, when men fall into company under such circumstances: that Mr. Bumble felt, every now and then, a powerful inducement, which he could not resist, to steal a look at the stranger: and that whenever he did so, he withdrew his eyes, in some confusion, to find that the stranger was at that moment stealing a look at him. Mr. Bumble’s awkwardness was enhanced by the very remarkable expression of the stranger’s eye, which was keen and bright, but shadowed by a scowl of distrust and suspicion, unlike anything he had ever observed before, and repulsive to behold.

When they had encountered each other’s glance several times in this way, the stranger, in a harsh, deep voice, broke silence.

‘Were you looking for me,’ he said, ‘when you peered in at the window?’

‘Not that I am aware of, unless you’re Mr.—’ Here Mr. Bumble stopped short; for he was curious to know the stranger’s name, and thought in his impatience, he might supply the blank.

‘I see you were not,’ said the stranger; an expression of quiet sarcasm playing about his mouth; ‘or you have known my name. You don’t know it. I would recommend you not to ask for it.’

‘I meant no harm, young man,’ observed Mr. Bumble, majestically.

‘And have done none,’ said the stranger.

Another silence succeeded this short dialogue: which was again broken by the stranger.

‘I have seen you before, I think?’ said he. ‘You were differently dressed at that time, and I only passed you in the street, but I should know you again. You were beadle here, once; were you not?’

‘I was,’ said Mr. Bumble, in some surprise; ‘porochial beadle.’

‘Just so,’ rejoined the other, nodding his head. ‘It was in that character I saw you. What are you now?’

‘Master of the workhouse,’ rejoined Mr. Bumble, slowly and impressively, to check any undue familiarity the stranger might otherwise assume. ‘Master of the workhouse, young man!’

‘You have the same eye to your own interest, that you always had, I doubt not?’ resumed the stranger, looking keenly into Mr. Bumble’s eyes, as he raised them in astonishment at the question.

‘Don’t scruple to answer freely, man. I know you pretty well, you see.’

‘I suppose, a married man,’ replied Mr. Bumble, shading his eyes with his hand, and surveying the stranger, from head to foot, in evident perplexity, ‘is not more averse to turning an honest penny when he can, than a single one. Porochial officers are not so well paid that they can afford to refuse any little extra fee, when it comes to them in a civil and proper manner.’

The stranger smiled, and nodded his head again: as much to say, he had not mistaken his man; then rang the bell.

‘Fill this glass again,’ he said, handing Mr. Bumble’s empty tumbler to the landlord. ‘Let it be strong and hot. You like it so, I suppose?’

‘Not too strong,’ replied Mr. Bumble, with a delicate cough.

‘You understand what that means, landlord!’ said the stranger, drily.

The host smiled, disappeared, and shortly afterwards returned with a

steaming jorum: of which, the first gulp brought the water into Mr. Bumble's eyes.

'Now listen to me,' said the stranger, after closing the door and window. 'I came down to this place, to-day, to find you out; and, by one of those chances which the devil throws in the way of his friends sometimes, you walked into the very room I was sitting in, while you were uppermost in my mind. I want some information from you. I don't ask you to give it for nothing, slight as it is. Put up that, to begin with.'

As he spoke, he pushed a couple of sovereigns across the table to his companion, carefully, as though unwilling that the chinking of money should be heard without. When Mr. Bumble had scrupulously examined the coins, to see that they were genuine, and had put them up, with much satisfaction, in his waistcoat-pocket, he went on:

'Carry your memory back—let me see—twelve years, last winter.'

'It's a long time,' said Mr. Bumble. 'Very good. I've done it.'

'The scene, the workhouse.'

'Good!'

'And the time, night.'

'Yes.'

'And the place, the crazy hole, wherever it was, in which miserable drabs brought forth the life and health so often denied to themselves—gave birth to puling children for the parish to rear; and hid their shame, rot 'em in the grave!'

'The lying-in room, I suppose?' said Mr. Bumble, not quite following the stranger's excited description.

'Yes,' said the stranger. 'A boy was born there.'

'A many boys,' observed Mr. Bumble, shaking his head, despondingly.

'A murrain on the young devils!' cried the stranger; 'I speak of one; a meek-looking, pale-faced boy, who was apprenticed down here, to a coffin-maker—I wish he had made his coffin, and screwed his body in it—and who afterwards ran away to London, as it was supposed.

'Why, you mean Oliver! Young Twist!' said Mr. Bumble; 'I remember him, of course. There wasn't a obstinater young rascal—'

'It's not of him I want to hear; I've heard enough of him,' said the stranger, stopping Mr. Bumble in the outset of a tirade on the subject of poor Oliver's vices. 'It's of a woman; the hag that nursed his mother. Where

is she?’

‘Where is she?’ said Mr. Bumble, whom the gin-and-water had rendered facetious. ‘It would be hard to tell. There’s no midwifery there, whichever place she’s gone to; so I suppose she’s out of employment, anyway.’

‘What do you mean?’ demanded the stranger, sternly.

‘That she died last winter,’ rejoined Mr. Bumble.

The man looked fixedly at him when he had given this information, and although he did not withdraw his eyes for some time afterwards, his gaze gradually became vacant and abstracted, and he seemed lost in thought. For some time, he appeared doubtful whether he ought to be relieved or disappointed by the intelligence; but at length he breathed more freely; and withdrawing his eyes, observed that it was no great matter. With that he rose, as if to depart.

But Mr. Bumble was cunning enough; and he at once saw that an opportunity was opened, for the lucrative disposal of some secret in the possession of his better half. He well remembered the night of old Sally’s death, which the occurrences of that day had given him good reason to recollect, as the occasion on which he had proposed to Mrs. Corney; and although that lady had never confided to him the disclosure of which she had been the solitary witness, he had heard enough to know that it related to something that had occurred in the old woman’s attendance, as workhouse nurse, upon the young mother of Oliver Twist. Hastily calling this circumstance to mind, he informed the stranger, with an air of mystery, that one woman had been closeted with the old harridan shortly before she died; and that she could, as he had reason to believe, throw some light on the subject of his inquiry.

‘How can I find her?’ said the stranger, thrown off his guard; and plainly showing that all his fears (whatever they were) were aroused afresh by the intelligence.

‘Only through me,’ rejoined Mr. Bumble.

‘When?’ cried the stranger, hastily.

‘To-morrow,’ rejoined Bumble.

‘At nine in the evening,’ said the stranger, producing a scrap of paper, and writing down upon it, an obscure address by the water-side, in characters that betrayed his agitation; ‘at nine in the evening, bring her to me there. I needn’t tell you to be secret. It’s your interest.’

With these words, he led the way to the door, after stopping to pay for the liquor that had been drunk. Shortly remarking that their roads were different, he departed, without more ceremony than an emphatic repetition of the hour of appointment for the following night.

On glancing at the address, the parochial functionary observed that it contained no name. The stranger had not gone far, so he made after him to ask it.

‘What do you want?’ cried the man, turning quickly round, as Bumble touched him on the arm. ‘Following me?’

‘Only to ask a question,’ said the other, pointing to the scrap of paper. ‘What name am I to ask for?’

‘Monks!’ rejoined the man; and strode hastily, away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IT WAS A DULL, CLOSE, overcast summer evening. The clouds, which had been threatening all day, spread out in a dense and sluggish mass of vapour, already yielded large drops of rain, and seemed to presage a violent thunder-storm, when Mr. and Mrs. Bumble, turning out of the main street of the town, directed their course towards a scattered little colony of ruinous houses, distant from it some mile and a-half, or thereabouts, and erected on a low unwholesome swamp, bordering upon the river.

They were both wrapped in old and shabby outer garments, which might, perhaps, serve the double purpose of protecting their persons from the rain, and sheltering them from observation. The husband carried a lantern, from which, however, no light yet shone; and trudged on, a few paces in front, as though—the way being dirty—to give his wife the benefit of treading in his heavy footprints. They went on, in profound silence; every now and then, Mr. Bumble relaxed his pace, and turned his head as if to make sure that his helpmate was following; then, discovering that she was close at his heels, he mended his rate of walking, and proceeded, at a considerable increase of speed, towards their place of destination.

This was far from being a place of doubtful character; for it had long been known as the residence of none but low ruffians, who, under various pretences of living by their labour, subsisted chiefly on plunder and crime. It was a collection of mere hovels: some, hastily built with loose bricks: others, of old worm-eaten ship-timber: jumbled together without any attempt at order or arrangement, and planted, for the most part, within a few feet of the river’s bank. A few leaky boats drawn up on the mud, and made fast to the dwarf wall which skirted it: and here and there an oar or coil of rope: appeared, at first, to indicate that the inhabitants of these miserable cottages pursued some avocation on the river; but a glance at the shattered

and useless condition of the articles thus displayed, would have led a passer-by, without much difficulty, to the conjecture that they were disposed there, rather for the preservation of appearances, than with any view to their being actually employed.

In the heart of this cluster of huts; and skirting the river, which its upper stories overhung; stood a large building, formerly used as a manufactory of some kind. It had, in its day, probably furnished employment to the inhabitants of the surrounding tenements. But it had long since gone to ruin. The rat, the worm, and the action of the damp, had weakened and rotted the piles on which it stood; and a considerable portion of the building had already sunk down into the water; while the remainder, tottering and bending over the dark stream, seemed to wait a favourable opportunity of following its old companion, and involving itself in the same fate.

It was before this ruinous building that the worthy couple paused, as the first peal of distant thunder reverberated in the air, and the rain commenced pouring violently down.

‘The place should be somewhere here,’ said Bumble, consulting a scrap of paper he held in his hand.

‘Halloa there!’ cried a voice from above.

Following the sound, Mr. Bumble raised his head and descried a man looking out of a door, breast-high, on the second story.

‘Stand still, a minute,’ cried the voice; ‘I’ll be with you directly.’ With which the head disappeared, and the door closed.

‘Is that the man?’ asked Mr. Bumble’s good lady.

Mr. Bumble nodded in the affirmative.

‘Then, mind what I told you,’ said the matron: ‘and be careful to say as little as you can, or you’ll betray us at once.’

Mr. Bumble, who had eyed the building with very rueful looks, was apparently about to express some doubts relative to the advisability of proceeding any further with the enterprise just then, when he was prevented by the appearance of Monks: who opened a small door, near which they stood, and beckoned them inwards.

‘Come in!’ he cried impatiently, stamping his foot upon the ground. ‘Don’t keep me here!’

The woman, who had hesitated at first, walked boldly in, without any other invitation. Mr. Bumble, who was ashamed or afraid to lag behind,

followed: obviously very ill at ease and with scarcely any of that remarkable dignity which was usually his chief characteristic.

‘What the devil made you stand lingering there, in the wet?’ said Monks, turning round, and addressing Bumble, after he had bolted the door behind them.

‘We—we were only cooling ourselves,’ stammered Bumble, looking apprehensively about him.

‘Cooling yourselves!’ retorted Monks. ‘Not all the rain that ever fell, or ever will fall, will put as much of hell’s fire out, as a man can carry about with him. You won’t cool yourself so easily; don’t think it!’

With this agreeable speech, Monks turned short upon the matron, and bent his gaze upon her, till even she, who was not easily cowed, was fain to withdraw her eyes, and turn them towards the ground.

‘This is the woman, is it?’ demanded Monks.

‘Hem! That is the woman,’ replied Mr. Bumble, mindful of his wife’s caution.

‘You think women never can keep secrets, I suppose?’ said the matron, interposing, and returning, as she spoke, the searching look of Monks.

‘I know they will always keep *one* till it’s found out,’ said Monks.

‘And what may that be?’ asked the matron.

‘The loss of their own good name,’ replied Monks. ‘So, by the same rule, if a woman’s a party to a secret that might hang or transport her, I’m not afraid of her telling it to anybody; not I! Do you understand, mistress?’

‘No,’ rejoined the matron, slightly colouring as she spoke.

‘Of course you don’t!’ said Monks. ‘How should you?’

Bestowing something half-way between a smile and a frown upon his two companions, and again beckoning them to follow him, the man hastened across the apartment, which was of considerable extent, but low in the roof. He was preparing to ascend a steep staircase, or rather ladder, leading to another floor of warehouses above: when a bright flash of lightning streamed down the aperture, and a peal of thunder followed, which shook the crazy building to its centre.

‘Hear it!’ he cried, shrinking back. ‘Hear it! Rolling and crashing on as if it echoed through a thousand caverns where the devils were hiding from it. I hate the sound!’

He remained silent for a few moments; and then, removing his hands

suddenly from his face, showed, to the unspeakable discomposure of Mr. Bumble, that it was much distorted and discoloured.

‘These fits come over me, now and then,’ said Monks, observing his alarm; ‘and thunder sometimes brings them on. Don’t mind me now; it’s all over for this once.’

Thus speaking, he led the way up the ladder; and hastily closing the window-shutter of the room into which it led, lowered a lantern which hung at the end of a rope and pulley passed through one of the heavy beams in the ceiling: and which cast a dim light upon an old table and three chairs that were placed beneath it.

‘Now,’ said Monks, when they had all three seated themselves, ‘the sooner we come to our business, the better for all. The woman know what it is, does she?’

The question was addressed to Bumble; but his wife anticipated the reply, by intimating that she was perfectly acquainted with it.

‘He is right in saying that you were with this hag the night she died; and that she told you something—’

‘About the mother of the boy you named,’ replied the matron interrupting him. ‘Yes.’

‘The first question is, of what nature was her communication?’ said Monks.

‘That’s the second,’ observed the woman with much deliberation. ‘The first is, what may the communication be worth?’

‘Who the devil can tell that, without knowing of what kind it is?’ asked Monks.

‘Nobody better than you, I am persuaded,’ answered Mrs. Bumble: who did not want for spirit, as her yoke-fellow could abundantly testify.

‘Humph!’ said Monks significantly, and with a look of eager inquiry; ‘there may be money’s worth to get, eh?’

‘Perhaps there may,’ was the composed reply.

‘Something that was taken from her,’ said Monks. ‘Something that she wore. Something that—’

‘You had better bid,’ interrupted Mrs. Bumble. ‘I have heard enough, already, to assure me that you are the man I ought to talk to.’

Mr. Bumble, who had not yet been admitted by his better half into any greater share of the secret than he had originally possessed, listened to this

dialogue with outstretched neck and distended eyes: which he directed towards his wife and Monks, by turns, in undisguised astonishment; increased, if possible, when the latter sternly demanded, what sum was required for the disclosure.

‘What’s it worth to you?’ asked the woman, as collectedly as before.

‘It may be nothing; it may be twenty pounds,’ replied Monks. ‘Speak out, and let me know which.’

‘Add five pounds to the sum you have named; give me five-and-twenty pounds in gold,’ said the woman; ‘and I’ll tell you all I know. Not before.’

‘Five-and-twenty pounds!’ exclaimed Monks, drawing back.

‘I spoke as plainly as I could,’ replied Mrs. Bumble. ‘It’s not a large sum, either.’

‘Not a large sum for a paltry secret, that may be nothing when it’s told!’ cried Monks impatiently; ‘and which has been lying dead for twelve years past or more!’

‘Such matters keep well, and, like good wine, often double their value in course of time,’ answered the matron, still preserving the resolute indifference she had assumed. ‘As to lying dead, there are those who will lie dead for twelve thousand years to come, or twelve million, for anything you or I know, who will tell strange tales at last!’

‘What if I pay it for nothing?’ asked Monks, hesitating.

‘You can easily take it away again,’ replied the matron. ‘I am but a woman; alone here; and unprotected.’

‘Not alone, my dear, nor unprotected, neither,’ submitted Mr. Bumble, in a voice tremulous with fear: ‘*I* am here, my dear. And besides,’ said Mr. Bumble, his teeth chattering as he spoke, ‘Mr. Monks is too much of a gentleman to attempt any violence on porochial persons. Mr. Monks is aware that I am not a young man, my dear, and also that I am a little run to seed, as I may say; bu he has heerd: I say I have no doubt Mr. Monks has heerd, my dear: that I am a very determined officer, with very uncommon strength, if I’m once roused. I only want a little rousing; that’s all.’

As Mr. Bumble spoke, he made a melancholy feint of grasping his lantern with fierce determination; and plainly showed, by the alarmed expression of every feature, that he *did* want a little rousing, and not a little, prior to making any very warlike demonstration: unless, indeed, against paupers, or other person or persons trained down for the purpose.

‘You are a fool,’ said Mrs. Bumble, in reply; ‘and had better hold your tongue.’

‘He had better have cut it out, before he came, if he can’t speak in a lower tone,’ said Monks, grimly. ‘So! He’s your husband, eh?’

‘He my husband!’ tittered the matron, parrying the question.

‘I thought as much, when you came in,’ rejoined Monks, marking the angry glance which the lady darted at her spouse as she spoke. ‘So much the better; I have less hesitation in dealing with two people, when I find that there’s only one will between them. I’m in earnest. See here!’

He thrust his hand into a side-pocket; and producing a canvas bag, told out twenty-five sovereigns on the table, and pushed them over to the woman.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘gather them up; and when this cursed peal of thunder, which I feel is coming up to break over the house-top, is gone, let’s hear your story.’

The thunder, which seemed in fact much nearer, and to shiver and break almost over their heads, having subsided, Monks, raising his face from the table, bent forward to listen to what the woman should say. The faces of the three nearly touched, as the two men leant over the small table in their eagerness to hear, and the woman also leant forward to render her whisper audible. The sickly rays of the suspended lantern falling directly upon them, aggravated the paleness and anxiety of their countenances: which, encircled by the deepest gloom and darkness, looked ghastly in the extreme.

‘When this woman, that we called old Sally, died,’ the matron began, ‘she and I were alone.’

‘Was there no one by?’ asked Monks, in the same hollow whisper; ‘No sick wretch or idiot in some other bed? No one who could hear, and might, by possibility, understand?’

‘Not a soul,’ replied the woman; ‘we were alone. *I* stood alone beside the body when death came over it.’

‘Good,’ said Monks, regarding her attentively. ‘Go on.’

‘She spoke of a young creature,’ resumed the matron, ‘who had brought a child into the world some years before; not merely in the same room, but in the same bed, in which she then lay dying.’

‘Ay?’ said Monks, with quivering lip, and glancing over his shoulder, ‘Blood! How things come about!’

‘The child was the one you named to him last night,’ said the matron, nodding carelessly towards her husband; ‘the mother this nurse had robbed.’

‘In life?’ asked Monks.

‘In death,’ replied the woman, with something like a shudder. ‘She stole from the corpse, when it had hardly turned to one, that which the dead mother had prayed her, with her last breath, to keep for the infant’s sake.’

‘She sold it,’ cried Monks, with desperate eagerness; ‘did she sell it? Where? When? To whom? How long before?’

‘As she told me, with great difficulty, that she had done this,’ said the matron, ‘she fell back and died.’

‘Without saying more?’ cried Monks, in a voice which, from its very suppression, seemed only the more furious. ‘It’s a lie! I’ll not be played with. She said more. I’ll tear the life out of you both, but I’ll know what it was.’

‘She didn’t utter another word,’ said the woman, to all appearance unmoved (as Mr. Bumble was very far from being) by the strange man’s violence; ‘but she clutched my gown, violently, with one hand, which was partly closed; and when I saw that she was dead, and so removed the hand by force, I found it clasped a scrap of dirty paper.’

‘Which contained—’ interposed Monks, stretching forward.

‘Nothing,’ replied the woman; ‘it was a pawnbroker’s duplicate.’

‘For what?’ demanded Monks.

‘In good time I’ll tell you.’ said the woman. ‘I judge that she had kept the trinket, for some time, in the hope of turning it to better account; and then had pawned it; and had saved or scraped together money to pay the pawnbroker’s interest year by year, and prevent its running out; so that if anything came of it, it could still be redeemed. Nothing had come of it; and, as I tell you, she died with the scrap of paper, all worn and tattered, in her hand. The time was out in two days; I thought something might one day come of it too; and so redeemed the pledge.’

‘Where is it now?’ asked Monks quickly.

‘*There*,’ replied the woman. And, as if glad to be relieved of it, she hastily threw upon the table a small kid bag scarcely large enough for a French watch, which Monks pouncing upon, tore open with trembling hands. It contained a little gold locket: in which were two locks of hair, and

a plain gold wedding-ring.

‘It has the word “Agnes” engraved on the inside,’ said the woman.

‘There is a blank left for the surname; and then follows the date; which is within a year before the child was born. I found out that.’

‘And this is all?’ said Monks, after a close and eager scrutiny of the contents of the little packet.

‘All,’ replied the woman.

Mr. Bumble drew a long breath, as if he were glad to find that the story was over, and no mention made of taking the five-and-twenty pounds back again; and now he took courage to wipe the perspiration which had been trickling over his nose, unchecked, during the whole of the previous dialogue.

‘I know nothing of the story, beyond what I can guess at,’ said his wife addressing Monks, after a short silence; ‘and I want to know nothing; for it’s safer not. But I may ask you two questions, may I?’

‘You may ask,’ said Monks, with some show of surprise; ‘but whether I answer or not is another question.’

‘—Which makes three,’ observed Mr. Bumble, essaying a stroke of facetiousness.

‘Is that what you expected to get from me?’ demanded the matron.

‘It is,’ replied Monks. ‘The other question?’

‘What do you propose to do with it? Can it be used against me?’

‘Never,’ rejoined Monks; ‘nor against me either. See here! But don’t move a step forward, or your life is not worth a bulrush.’

With these words, he suddenly wheeled the table aside, and pulling an iron ring in the boarding, threw back a large trap-door which opened close at Mr. Bumble’s feet, and caused that gentleman to retire several paces backward, with great precipitation.

‘Look down,’ said Monks, lowering the lantern into the gulf. ‘Don’t fear me. I could have let you down, quietly enough, when you were seated over it, if that had been my game.’

Thus encouraged, the matron drew near to the brink; and even Mr. Bumble himself, impelled by curiousity, ventured to do the same. The turbid water, swollen by the heavy rain, was rushing rapidly on below; and all other sounds were lost in the noise of its plashing and eddying against the green and slimy piles. There had once been a water-mill beneath; the

tide foaming and chafing round the few rotten stakes, and fragments of machinery that yet remained, seemed to dart onward, with a new impulse, when freed from the obstacles which had unavailingly attempted to stem its headlong course.

‘If you flung a man’s body down there, where would it be to-morrow morning?’ said Monks, swinging the lantern to and fro in the dark well.

‘Twelve miles down the river, and cut to pieces besides,’ replied Bumble, recoiling at the thought.

Monks drew the little packet from his breast, where he had hurriedly thrust it; and tying it to a leaden weight, which had formed a part of some pulley, and was lying on the floor, dropped it into the stream. It fell straight, and true as a die; clove the water with a scarcely audible splash; and was gone.

The three looking into each other’s faces, seemed to breathe more freely.

‘There!’ said Monks, closing the trap-door, which fell heavily back into its former position. ‘If the sea ever gives up its dead, as books say it will, it will keep its gold and silver to itself, and that trash among it. We have nothing more to say, and may break up our pleasant party.’

‘By all means,’ observed Mr. Bumble, with great alacrity.

‘You’ll keep a quiet tongue in your head, will you?’ said Monks, with a threatening look. ‘I am not afraid of your wife.’

‘You may depend upon me, young man,’ answered Mr. Bumble, bowing himself gradually towards the ladder, with excessive politeness. ‘On everybody’s account, young man; on my own, you know, Mr. Monks.’

‘I am glad, for your sake, to hear it,’ remarked Monks. ‘Light your lantern! And get away from here as fast as you can.’

It was fortunate that the conversation terminated at this point, or Mr. Bumble, who had bowed himself to within six inches of the ladder, would infallibly have pitched headlong into the room below. He lighted his lantern from that which Monks had detached from the rope, and now carried in his hand; and making no effort to prolong the discourse, descended in silence, followed by his wife. Monks brought up the rear, after pausing on the steps to satisfy himself that there were no other sounds to be heard than the beating of the rain without, and the rushing of the water.

They traversed the lower room, slowly, and with caution; for Monks started at every shadow; and Mr. Bumble, holding his lantern a foot above

the ground, walked not only with remarkable care, but with a marvellously light step for a gentleman of his figure: looking nervously about him for hidden trap-doors. The gate at which they had entered, was softly unfastened and opened by Monks; merely exchanging a nod with their mysterious acquaintance, the married couple emerged into the wet and darkness outside.

They were no sooner gone, than Monks, who appeared to entertain an invincible repugnance to being left alone, called to a boy who had been hidden somewhere below. Bidding him go first, and bear the light, he returned to the chamber he had just quitted.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ON THE EVENING FOLLOWING that upon which the three worthies mentioned in the last chapter, disposed of their little matter of business as therein narrated, Mr. William Sikes, awakening from a nap, drowsily growled forth an inquiry what time of night it was.

The room in which Mr. Sikes propounded this question, was not one of those he had tenanted, previous to the Chertsey expedition, although it was in the same quarter of the town, and was situated at no great distance from his former lodgings. It was not, in appearance, so desirable a habitation as his old quarters: being a mean and badly-furnished apartment, of very limited size; lighted only by one small window in the shelving roof, and abutting on a close and dirty lane. Nor were there wanting other indications of the good gentleman's having gone down in the world of late: for a great scarcity of furniture, and total absence of comfort, together with the disappearance of all such small moveables as spare clothes and linen, bespoke a state of extreme poverty; while the meagre and attenuated condition of Mr. Sikes himself would have fully confirmed these symptoms, if they had stood in any need of corroboration.

The housebreaker was lying on the bed, wrapped in his white great-coat, by way of dressing-gown, and displaying a set of features in no degree improved by the cadaverous hue of illness, and the addition of a soiled nightcap, and a stiff, black beard of a week's growth. The dog sat at the bedside: now eyeing his master with a wistful look, and now pricking his ears, and uttering a low growl as some noise in the street, or in the lower part of the house, attracted his attention. Seated by the window, busily engaged in patching an old waistcoat which formed a portion of the robber's ordinary dress, was a female: so pale and reduced with watching and privation, that there would have been considerable difficulty in

recognising her as the same Nancy who has already figured in this tale, but for the voice in which she replied to Mr. Sikes's question.

'Not long gone seven,' said the girl. 'How do you feel to-night, Bill?'

'As weak as water,' replied Mr. Sikes, with an imprecation on his eyes and limbs. 'Here; lend us a hand, and let me get off this thundering bed anyhow.'

Illness had not improved Mr. Sikes's temper; for, as the girl raised him up and led him to a chair, he muttered various curses on her awkwardness, and struck her.

'Whining are you?' said Sikes. 'Come! Don't stand snivelling there. If you can't do anything better than that, cut off altogether. D'ye hear me?'

'I hear you,' replied the girl, turning her face aside, and forcing a laugh. 'What fancy have you got in your head now?'

'Oh! you've thought better of it, have you?' growled Sikes, marking the tear which trembled in her eye. 'All the better for you, you have.'

'Why, you don't mean to say, you'd be hard upon me to-night, Bill,' said the girl, laying her hand upon his shoulder.

'No!' cried Mr. Sikes. 'Why not?'

'Such a number of nights,' said the girl, with a touch of woman's tenderness, which communicated something like sweetness of tone, even to her voice: 'such a number of nights as I've been patient with you, nursing and caring for you, as if you had been a child: and this the first that I've seen you like yourself; you wouldn't have served me as you did just now, if you'd thought of that, would you? Come, come; say you wouldn't.'

'Well, then,' rejoined Mr. Sikes, 'I wouldn't. Why, damme, now, the girls's whining again!'

'It's nothing,' said the girl, throwing herself into a chair. 'Don't you seem to mind me. It'll soon be over.'

'What'll be over?' demanded Mr. Sikes in a savage voice. 'What foolery are you up to, now, again? Get up and bustle about, and don't come over me with your woman's nonsense.'

At any other time, this remonstrance, and the tone in which it was delivered, would have had the desired effect; but the girl being really weak and exhausted, dropped her head over the back of the chair, and fainted, before Mr. Sikes could get out a few of the appropriate oaths with which, on similar occasions, he was accustomed to garnish his threats. Not knowing,

very well, what to do, in this uncommon emergency; for Miss Nancy's hysterics were usually of that violent kind which the patient fights and struggles out of, without much assistance; Mr. Sikes tried a little blasphemy: and finding that mode of treatment wholly ineffectual, called for assistance.

'What's the matter here, my dear?' said Fagin, looking in.

'Lend a hand to the girl, can't you?' replied Sikes impatiently. 'Don't stand chattering and grinning at me!'

With an exclamation of surprise, Fagin hastened to the girl's assistance, while Mr. John Dawkins (otherwise the Artful Dodger), who had followed his venerable friend into the room, hastily deposited on the floor a bundle with which he was laden; and snatching a bottle from the grasp of Master Charles Bates who came close at his heels, uncorked it in a twinkling with his teeth, and poured a portion of its contents down the patient's throat: previously taking a taste, himself, to prevent mistakes.

'Give her a whiff of fresh air with the bellows, Charley,' said Mr. Dawkins; 'and you slap her hands, Fagin, while Bill undoes the petticuts.'

These united restoratives, administered with great energy: especially that department consigned to Master Bates, who appeared to consider his share in the proceedings, a piece of unexampled pleasantry: were not long in producing the desired effect. The girl gradually recovered her senses; and, staggering to a chair by the bedside, hid her face upon the pillow: leaving Mr. Sikes to confront the new comers, in some astonishment at their unlooked-for appearance.

'Why, what evil wind has blowed you here?' he asked Fagin.

'No evil wind at all, my dear, for evil winds blow nobody any good; and I've brought something good with me, that you'll be glad to see. Dodger, my dear, open the bundle; and give Bill the little trifles that we spent all our money on, this morning.'

In compliance with Mr. Fagin's request, the Artful untied this bundle, which was of large size, and formed of an old table-cloth; and handed the articles it contained, one by one, to Charley Bates: who placed them on the table, with various encomiums on their rarity and excellence.

'Sitch a rabbit pie, Bill,' exclaimed that young gentleman, disclosing to view a huge pasty; 'sitch delicate creeturs, with sitch tender limbs, Bill, that the wery bones melt in your mouth, and there's no occasion to pick 'em;

half a pound of seven and six-penny green, so precious strong that if you mix it with biling water, it'll go nigh to blow the lid of the tea-pot off; a pound and a half of moist sugar that the niggers didn't work at all at, afore they got it up to sitch a pitch of goodness,—oh no! Two half-quartern brans; pound of best fresh; piece of double Glo'ster; and, to wind up all, some of the richest sort you ever lushed!'

Uttering this last panegyric, Master Bates produced, from one of his extensive pockets, a full-sized wine-bottle, carefully corked; while Mr. Dawkins, at the same instant, poured out a wine-glassful of raw spirits from the bottle he carried: which the invalid tossed down his throat without a moment's hesitation.

'Ah!' said Fagin, rubbing his hands with great satisfaction. 'You'll do, Bill; you'll do now.'

'Do!' exclaimed Mr. Sikes; 'I might have been done for, twenty times over, afore you'd have done anything to help me. What do you mean by leaving a man in this state, three weeks and more, you false-hearted wagabond?'

'Only hear him, boys!' said Fagin, shrugging his shoulders. 'And us come to bring him all these beau-ti-ful things.'

'The things is well enough in their way,' observed Mr. Sikes: a little soothed as he glanced over the table; 'but what have you got to say for yourself, why you should leave me here, down in the mouth, health, blunt, and everything else; and take no more notice of me, all this mortal time, than if I was that 'ere dog.—Drive him down, Charley!'

'I never see such a jolly dog as that,' cried Master Bates, doing as he was desired. 'Smelling the grub like a old lady a going to market! He'd make his fortun' on the stage that dog would, and rewive the drayma besides.'

'Hold your din,' cried Sikes, as the dog retreated under the bed: still growling angrily. 'What have you got to say for yourself, you withered old fence, eh?'

'I was away from London, a week and more, my dear, on a plant,' replied the Jew.

'And what about the other fortnight?' demanded Sikes. 'What about the other fortnight that you've left me lying here, like a sick rat in his hole?'

'I couldn't help it, Bill. I can't go into a long explanation before company; but I couldn't help it, upon my honour.'

‘Upon your what?’ growled Sikes, with excessive disgust. ‘Here! Cut me off a piece of that pie, one of you boys, to take the taste of that out of my mouth, or it’ll choke me dead.’

‘Don’t be out of temper, my dear,’ urged Fagin, submissively. ‘I have never forgot you, Bill; never once.’

‘No! I’ll pound it that you han’t,’ replied Sikes, with a bitter grin. ‘You’ve been scheming and plotting away, every hour that I have laid shivering and burning here; and Bill was to do this; and Bill was to do that; and Bill was to do it all, dirt cheap, as soon as he got well: and was quite poor enough for your work. If it hadn’t been for the girl, I might have died.’

‘There now, Bill,’ remonstrated Fagin, eagerly catching at the word. ‘If it hadn’t been for the girl! Who but poor ould Fagin was the means of your having such a handy girl about you?’

‘He says true enough there!’ said Nancy, coming hastily forward. ‘Let him be; let him be.’

Nancy’s appearance gave a new turn to the conversation; for the boys, receiving a sly wink from the wary old Jew, began to ply her with liquor: of which, however, she took very sparingly; while Fagin, assuming an unusual flow of spirits, gradually brought Mr. Sikes into a better temper, by affecting to regard his threats as a little pleasant banter; and, moreover, by laughing very heartily at one or two rough jokes, which, after repeated applications to the spirit-bottle, he condescended to make.

‘It’s all very well,’ said Mr. Sikes; ‘but I must have some blunt from you to-night.’

‘I haven’t a piece of coin about me,’ replied the Jew.

‘Then you’ve got lots at home,’ retorted Sikes; ‘and I must have some from there.’

‘Lots!’ cried Fagin, holding up is hands. ‘I haven’t so much as would—’

‘I don’t know how much you’ve got, and I dare say you hardly know yourself, as it would take a pretty long time to count it,’ said Sikes; ‘but I must have some to-night; and that’s flat.’

‘Well, well,’ said Fagin, with a sigh, ‘I’ll send the Artful round presently.’

‘You won’t do nothing of the kind,’ rejoined Mr. Sikes. ‘The Artful’s a deal too artful, and would forget to come, or lose his way, or get dodged by traps and so be perwented, or anything for an excuse, if you put him up to

it. Nancy shall go to the ken and fetch it, to make all sure; and I'll lie down and have a snooze while she's gone.'

After a great deal of haggling and squabbling, Fagin beat down the amount of the required advance from five pounds to three pounds four and sixpence: protesting with many solemn asseverations that that would only leave him eighteen-pence to keep house with; Mr. Sikes sullenly remarking that if he couldn't get any more he must accompany him home; with the Dodger and Master Bates put the eatables in the cupboard. The Jew then, taking leave of his affectionate friend, returned homeward, attended by Nancy and the boys: Mr. Sikes, meanwhile, flinging himself on the bed, and composing himself to sleep away the time until the young lady's return.

In due course, they arrived at Fagin's abode, where they found Toby Crackit and Mr. Chitling intent upon their fifteenth game at cribbage, which it is scarcely necessary to say the latter gentleman lost, and with it, his fifteenth and last sixpence: much to the amusement of his young friends. Mr. Crackit, apparently somewhat ashamed at being found relaxing himself with a gentleman so much his inferior in station and mental endowments, yawned, and inquiring after Sikes, took up his hat to go.

'Has nobody been, Toby?' asked Fagin.

'Not a living leg,' answered Mr. Crackit, pulling up his collar; 'it's been as dull as swipes. You ought to stand something handsome, Fagin, to recompense me for keeping house so long. Damme, I'm as flat as a juryman; and should have gone to sleep, as fast as Newgate, if I hadn't had the good natur' to amuse this youngster. Horrid dull, I'm blessed if I an't!'

With these and other ejaculations of the same kind, Mr. Toby Crackit swept up his winnings, and crammed them into his waistcoat pocket with a haughty air, as though such small pieces of silver were wholly beneath the consideration of a man of his figure; this done, he swaggered out of the room, with so much elegance and gentility, that Mr. Chitling, bestowing numerous admiring glances on his legs and boots till they were out of sight, assured the company that he considered his acquaintance cheap at fifteen sixpences an interview, and that he didn't value his losses the snap of his little finger.

'Wot a rum chap you are, Tom!' said Master Bates, highly amused by this declaration.

'Not a bit of it,' replied Mr. Chitling. 'Am I, Fagin?'

‘A very clever fellow, my dear,’ said Fagin, patting him on the shoulder, and winking to his other pupils.

‘And Mr. Crackit is a heavy swell; an’t he, Fagin?’ asked Tom.

‘No doubt at all of that, my dear.’

‘And it is a creditable thing to have his acquaintance; an’t it, Fagin?’ pursued Tom.

‘Very much so, indeed, my dear. They’re only jealous, Tom, because he won’t give it to them.’

‘Ah!’ cried Tom, triumphantly, ‘that’s where it is! He has cleaned me out. But I can go and earn some more, when I like; can’t I, Fagin?’

‘To be sure you can, and the sooner you go the better, Tom; so make up your loss at once, and don’t lose any more time. Dodger! Charley! It’s time you were on the lay. Come! It’s near ten, and nothing done yet.’

In obedience to this hint, the boys, nodding to Nancy, took up their hats, and left the room; the Dodger and his vivacious friend indulging, as they went, in many witticisms at the expense of Mr. Chitling; in whose conduct, it is but justice to say, there was nothing very conspicuous or peculiar: inasmuch as there are a great number of spirited young bloods upon town, who pay a much higher price than Mr. Chitling for being seen in good society: and a great number of fine gentlemen (composing the good society aforesaid) who established their reputation upon very much the same footing as flash Toby Crackit.

‘Now,’ said Fagin, when they had left the room, ‘I’ll go and get you that cash, Nancy. This is only the key of a little cupboard where I keep a few odd things the boys get, my dear. I never lock up my money, for I’ve got none to lock up, my dear—ha! ha! ha!—none to lock up. It’s a poor trade, Nancy, and no thanks; but I’m fond of seeing the young people about me; and I bear it all, I bear it all. Hush!’ he said, hastily concealing the key in his breast; ‘who’s that? Listen!’

The girl, who was sitting at the table with her arms folded, appeared in no way interested in the arrival: or to care whether the person, whoever he was, came or went: until the murmur of a man’s voice reached her ears. The instant she caught the sound, she tore off her bonnet and shawl, with the rapidity of lightning, and thrust them under the table. The Jew, turning round immediately afterwards, she muttered a complaint of the heat: in a tone of languor that contrasted, very remarkably, with the extreme haste and

violence of this action: which, however, had been unobserved by Fagin, who had his back towards her at the time.

‘Bah!’ he whispered, as though nettled by the interruption; ‘it’s the man I expected before; he’s coming downstairs. Not a word about the money while he’s here, Nance. He won’t stop long. Not ten minutes, my dear.’

Laying his skinny forefinger upon his lip, the Jew carried a candle to the door, as a man’s step was heard upon the stairs without. He reached it, at the same moment as the visitor, who, coming hastily into the room, was close upon the girl before he observed her.

It was Monks.

‘Only one of my young people,’ said Fagin, observing that Monks drew back, on beholding a stranger. ‘Don’t move, Nancy.’

The girl drew closer to the table, and glancing at Monks with an air of careless levity, withdrew her eyes; but as he turned towards Fagin, she stole another look; so keen and searching, and full of purpose, that if there had been any bystander to observe the change, he could hardly have believed the two looks to have proceeded from the same person.

‘Any news?’ inquired Fagin.

‘Great.’

‘And—and—good?’ asked Fagin, hesitating as though he feared to vex the other man by being too sanguine.

‘Not bad, any way,’ replied Monks with a smile. ‘I have been prompt enough this time. Let me have a word with you.’

The girl drew closer to the table, and made no offer to leave the room, although she could see that Monks was pointing to her. The Jew: perhaps fearing she might say something aloud about the money, if he endeavoured to get rid of her: pointed upward, and took Monks out of the room.

‘Not that infernal hole we were in before,’ she could hear the man say as they went upstairs. Fagin laughed; and making some reply which did not reach her, seemed, by the creaking of the boards, to lead his companion to the second story.

Before the sound of their footsteps had ceased to echo through the house, the girl had slipped off her shoes; and drawing her gown loosely over her head, and muffling her arms in it, stood at the door, listening with breathless interest. The moment the noise ceased, she glided from the room; ascended the stairs with incredible softness and silence; and was lost in the gloom

above.

The room remained deserted for a quarter of an hour or more; the girl glided back with the same unearthly tread; and, immediately afterwards, the two men were heard descending. Monks went at once into the street; and the Jew crawled upstairs again for the money. When he returned, the girl was adjusting her shawl and bonnet, as if preparing to be gone.

‘Why, Nance!’ exclaimed the Jew, starting back as he put down the candle, ‘how pale you are!’

‘Pale!’ echoed the girl, shading her eyes with her hands, as if to look steadily at him.

‘Quite horrible. What have you been doing to yourself?’

‘Nothing that I know of, except sitting in this close place for I don’t know how long and all,’ replied the girl carelessly. ‘Come! Let me get back; that’s a dear.’

With a sigh for every piece of money, Fagin told the amount into her hand. They parted without more conversation, merely interchanging a ‘good-night.’

When the girl got into the open street, she sat down upon a doorstep; and seemed, for a few moments, wholly bewildered and unable to pursue her way. Suddenly she arose; and hurrying on, in a direction quite opposite to that in which Sikes was awaiting her returned, quickened her pace, until it gradually resolved into a violent run. After completely exhausting herself, she stopped to take breath: and, as if suddenly recollecting herself, and deploring her inability to do something she was bent upon, wrung her hands, and burst into tears.

It might be that her tears relieved her, or that she felt the full hopelessness of her condition; but she turned back; and hurrying with nearly as great rapidity in the contrary direction; partly to recover lost time, and partly to keep pace with the violent current of her own thoughts: soon reached the dwelling where she had left the housebreaker.

If she betrayed any agitation, when she presented herself to Mr. Sikes, he did not observe it; for merely inquiring if she had brought the money, and receiving a reply in the affirmative, he uttered a growl of satisfaction, and replacing his head upon the pillow, resumed the slumbers which her arrival had interrupted.

It was fortunate for her that the possession of money occasioned him so

much employment next day in the way of eating and drinking; and withal had so beneficial an effect in smoothing down the asperities of his temper; that he had neither time nor inclination to be very critical upon her behaviour and deportment. That she had all the abstracted and nervous manner of one who is on the eve of some bold and hazardous step, which it has required no common struggle to resolve upon, would have been obvious to the lynx-eyed Fagin, who would most probably have taken the alarm at once; but Mr. Sikes lacking the niceties of discrimination, and being troubled with no more subtle misgivings than those which resolve themselves into a dogged roughness of behaviour towards everybody; and being, furthermore, in an unusually amiable condition, as has been already observed; saw nothing unusual in her demeanor, and indeed, troubled himself so little about her, that, had her agitation been far more perceptible than it was, it would have been very unlikely to have awakened his suspicions.

As that day closed in, the girl's excitement increased; and, when night came on, and she sat by, watching until the housebreaker should drink himself asleep, there was an unusual paleness in her cheek, and a fire in her eye, that even Sikes observed with astonishment.

Mr. Sikes being weak from the fever, was lying in bed, taking hot water with his gin to render it less inflammatory; and had pushed his glass towards Nancy to be replenished for the third or fourth time, when these symptoms first struck him.

'Why, burn my body!' said the man, raising himself on his hands as he stared the girl in the face. 'You look like a corpse come to life again. What's the matter?'

'Matter!' replied the girl. 'Nothing. What do you look at me so hard for?'

'What foolery is this?' demanded Sikes, grasping her by the arm, and shaking her roughly. 'What is it? What do you mean? What are you thinking of?'

'Of many things, Bill,' replied the girl, shivering, and as she did so, pressing her hands upon her eyes. 'But, Lord! What odds in that?'

The tone of forced gaiety in which the last words were spoken, seemed to produce a deeper impression on Sikes than the wild and rigid look which had preceded them.

‘I tell you wot it is,’ said Sikes; ‘if you haven’t caught the fever, and got it comin’ on, now, there’s something more than usual in the wind, and something dangerous too. You’re not a-going to—. No, damme! you wouldn’t do that!’

‘Do what?’ asked the girl.

‘There ain’t,’ said Sikes, fixing his eyes upon her, and muttering the words to himself; ‘there ain’t a stauncher-hearted gal going, or I’d have cut her throat three months ago. She’s got the fever coming on; that’s it.’

Fortifying himself with this assurance, Sikes drained the glass to the bottom, and then, with many grumbling oaths, called for his physic. The girl jumped up, with great alacrity; poured it quickly out, but with her back towards him; and held the vessel to his lips, while he drank off the contents.

‘Now,’ said the robber, ‘come and sit aside of me, and put on your own face; or I’ll alter it so, that you won’t know it agin when you do want it.’

The girl obeyed. Sikes, locking her hand in his, fell back upon the pillow: turning his eyes upon her face. They closed; opened again; closed once more; again opened. He shifted his position restlessly; and, after dozing again, and again, for two or three minutes, and as often springing up with a look of terror, and gazing vacantly about him, was suddenly stricken, as it were, while in the very attitude of rising, into a deep and heavy sleep. The grasp of his hand relaxed; the upraised arm fell languidly by his side; and he lay like one in a profound trance.

‘The laudanum has taken effect at last,’ murmured the girl, as she rose from the bedside. ‘I may be too late, even now.’

She hastily dressed herself in her bonnet and shawl: looking fearfully round, from time to time, as if, despite the sleeping draught, she expected every moment to feel the pressure of Sikes’s heavy hand upon her shoulder; then, stooping softly over the bed, she kissed the robber’s lips; and then opening and closing the room-door with noiseless touch, hurried from the house.

A watchman was crying half-past nine, down a dark passage through which she had to pass, in gaining the main thoroughfare.

‘Has it long gone the half-hour?’ asked the girl.

‘It’ll strike the hour in another quarter,’ said the man: raising his lantern to her face.

‘And I cannot get there in less than an hour or more,’ muttered Nancy:

brushing swiftly past him, and gliding rapidly down the street.

Many of the shops were already closing in the back lanes and avenues through which she tracked her way, in making from Spitalfields towards the West-End of London. The clock struck ten, increasing her impatience. She tore along the narrow pavement: elbowing the passengers from side to side; and darting almost under the horses' heads, crossed crowded streets, where clusters of persons were eagerly watching their opportunity to do the like.

'The woman is mad!' said the people, turning to look after her as she rushed away.

When she reached the more wealthy quarter of the town, the streets were comparatively deserted; and here her headlong progress excited a still greater curiosity in the stragglers whom she hurried past. Some quickened their pace behind, as though to see whither she was hastening at such an unusual rate; and a few made head upon her, and looked back, surprised at her undiminished speed; but they fell off one by one; and when she neared her place of destination, she was alone.

It was a family hotel in a quiet but handsome street near Hyde Park. As the brilliant light of the lamp which burnt before its door, guided her to the spot, the clock struck eleven. She had loitered for a few paces as though irresolute, and making up her mind to advance; but the sound determined her, and she stepped into the hall. The porter's seat was vacant. She looked round with an air of incertitude, and advanced towards the stairs.

'Now, young woman!' said a smartly-dressed female, looking out from a door behind her, 'who do you want here?'

'A lady who is stopping in this house,' answered the girl.

'A lady!' was the reply, accompanied with a scornful look. 'What lady?'

'Miss Maylie,' said Nancy.

The young woman, who had by this time, noted her appearance, replied only by a look of virtuous disdain; and summoned a man to answer her. To him, Nancy repeated her request.

'What name am I to say?' asked the waiter.

'It's of no use saying any,' replied Nancy.

'Nor business?' said the man.

'No, nor that neither,' rejoined the girl. 'I must see the lady.'

'Come!' said the man, pushing her towards the door. 'None of this. Take yourself off.'

‘I shall be carried out if I go!’ said the girl violently; ‘and I can make that a job that two of you won’t like to do. Isn’t there anybody here,’ she said, looking round, ‘that will see a simple message carried for a poor wretch like me?’

This appeal produced an effect on a good-tempered-faced man-cook, who with some of the other servants was looking on, and who stepped forward to interfere.

‘Take it up for her, Joe; can’t you?’ said this person.

‘What’s the good?’ replied the man. ‘You don’t suppose the young lady will see such as her; do you?’

This allusion to Nancy’s doubtful character, raised a vast quantity of chaste wrath in the bosoms of four housemaids, who remarked, with great fervour, that the creature was a disgrace to her sex; and strongly advocated her being thrown, ruthlessly, into the kennel.

‘Do what you like with me,’ said the girl, turning to the men again; ‘but do what I ask you first, and I ask you to give this message for God Almighty’s sake.’

The soft-hearted cook added his intercession, and the result was that the man who had first appeared undertook its delivery.

‘What’s it to be?’ said the man, with one foot on the stairs.

‘That a young woman earnestly asks to speak to Miss Maylie alone,’ said Nancy; ‘and that if the lady will only hear the first word she has to say, she will know whether to hear her business, or to have her turned out of doors as an impostor.’

‘I say,’ said the man, ‘you’re coming it strong!’

‘You give the message,’ said the girl firmly; ‘and let me hear the answer.’

The man ran upstairs. Nancy remained, pale and almost breathless, listening with quivering lip to the very audible expressions of scorn, of which the chaste housemaids were very prolific; and of which they became still more so, when the man returned, and said the young woman was to walk upstairs.

‘It’s no good being proper in this world,’ said the first housemaid.

‘Brass can do better than the gold what has stood the fire,’ said the second.

The third contented herself with wondering ‘what ladies was made of’;

and the fourth took the first in a quartette of ‘Shameful!’ with which the Dianas concluded.

Regardless of all this: for she had weightier matters at heart: Nancy followed the man, with trembling limbs, to a small ante-chamber, lighted by a lamp from the ceiling. Here he left her, and retired.

CHAPTER XL

THE GIRL'S LIFE HAD been squandered in the streets, and among the most noisome of the stews and dens of London, but there was something of the woman's original nature left in her still; and when she heard a light step approaching the door opposite to that by which she had entered, and thought of the wide contrast which the small room would in another moment contain, she felt burdened with the sense of her own deep shame, and shrunk as though she could scarcely bear the presence of her with whom she had sought this interview.

But struggling with these better feelings was pride,—the vice of the lowest and most debased creatures no less than of the high and self-assured. The miserable companion of thieves and ruffians, the fallen outcast of low haunts, the associate of the scourings of the jails and hulks, living within the shadow of the gallows itself,—even this degraded being felt too proud to betray a feeble gleam of the womanly feeling which she thought a weakness, but which alone connected her with that humanity, of which her wasting life had obliterated so many, many traces when a very child.

She raised her eyes sufficiently to observe that the figure which presented itself was that of a slight and beautiful girl; then, bending them on the ground, she tossed her head with affected carelessness as she said:

'It's a hard matter to get to see you, lady. If I had taken offence, and gone away, as many would have done, you'd have been sorry for it one day, and not without reason either.'

'I am very sorry if any one has behaved harshly to you,' replied Rose. 'Do not think of that. Tell me why you wished to see me. I am the person you inquired for.'

The kind tone of this answer, the sweet voice, the gentle manner, the absence of any accent of haughtiness or displeasure, took the girl

completely by surprise, and she burst into tears.

‘Oh, lady, lady!’ she said, clasping her hands passionately before her face, ‘if there was more like you, there would be fewer like me,—there would—there would!’

‘Sit down,’ said Rose, earnestly. ‘If you are in poverty or affliction I shall be truly glad to relieve you if I can,—I shall indeed. Sit down.’

‘Let me stand, lady,’ said the girl, still weeping, ‘and do not speak to me so kindly till you know me better. It is growing late. Is—is—that door shut?’

‘Yes,’ said Rose, recoiling a few steps, as if to be nearer assistance in case she should require it. ‘Why?’

‘Because,’ said the girl, ‘I am about to put my life and the lives of others in your hands. I am the girl that dragged little Oliver back to old Fagin’s on the night he went out from the house in Pentonville.’

‘You!’ said Rose Maylie.

‘I, lady!’ replied the girl. ‘I am the infamous creature you have heard of, that lives among the thieves, and that never from the first moment I can recollect my eyes and senses opening on London streets have known any better life, or kinder words than they have given me, so help me God! Do not mind shrinking openly from me, lady. I am younger than you would think, to look at me, but I am well used to it. The poorest women fall back, as I make my way along the crowded pavement.’

‘What dreadful things are these!’ said Rose, involuntarily falling from her strange companion.

‘Thank Heaven upon your knees, dear lady,’ cried the girl, ‘that you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and—and—something worse than all—as I have been from my cradle. I may use the word, for the alley and the gutter were mine, as they will be my deathbed.’

‘I pity you!’ said Rose, in a broken voice. ‘It wrings my heart to hear you!’

‘Heaven bless you for your goodness!’ rejoined the girl. ‘If you knew what I am sometimes, you would pity me, indeed. But I have stolen away from those who would surely murder me, if they knew I had been here, to tell you what I have overheard. Do you know a man named Monks?’

‘No,’ said Rose.

‘He knows you,’ replied the girl; ‘and knew you were here, for it was by hearing him tell the place that I found you out.’

‘I never heard the name,’ said Rose.

‘Then he goes by some other amongst us,’ rejoined the girl, ‘which I more than thought before. Some time ago, and soon after Oliver was put into your house on the night of the robbery, I—suspecting this man—listened to a conversation held between him and Fagin in the dark. I found out, from what I heard, that Monks—the man I asked you about, you know —’

‘Yes,’ said Rose, ‘I understand.’

‘—That Monks,’ pursued the girl, ‘had seen him accidently with two of our boys on the day we first lost him, and had known him directly to be the same child that he was watching for, though I couldn’t make out why. A bargain was struck with Fagin, that if Oliver was got back he should have a certain sum; and he was to have more for making him a thief, which this Monks wanted for some purpose of his own.’

‘For what purpose?’ asked Rose.

‘He caught sight of my shadow on the wall as I listened, in the hope of finding out,’ said the girl; ‘and there are not many people besides me that could have got out of their way in time to escape discovery. But I did; and I saw him no more till last night.’

‘And what occurred then?’

‘I’ll tell you, lady. Last night he came again. Again they went upstairs, and I, wrapping myself up so that my shadow would not betray me, again listened at the door. The first words I heard Monks say were these: “So the only proofs of the boy’s identity lie at the bottom of the river, and the old hag that received them from the mother is rotting in her coffin.” They laughed, and talked of his success in doing this; and Monks, talking on about the boy, and getting very wild, said that though he had got the young devil’s money safely now, he’d rather have had it the other way; for, what a game it would have been to have brought down the boast of the father’s will, by driving him through every jail in town, and then hauling him up for some capital felony which Fagin could easily manage, after having made a good profit of him besides.’

‘What is all this!’ said Rose.

‘The truth, lady, though it comes from my lips,’ replied the girl. ‘Then,

he said, with oaths common enough in my ears, but strange to yours, that if he could gratify his hatred by taking the boy's life without bringing his own neck in danger, he would; but, as he couldn't, he'd be upon the watch to meet him at every turn in life; and if he took advantage of his birth and history, he might harm him yet. "In short, Fagin," he says, "Jew as you are, you never laid such snares as I'll contrive for my young brother, Oliver."'

'His brother!' exclaimed Rose.

'Those were his words,' said Nancy, glancing uneasily round, as she had scarcely ceased to do, since she began to speak, for a vision of Sikes haunted her perpetually. 'And more. When he spoke of you and the other lady, and said it seemed contrived by Heaven, or the devil, against him, that Oliver should come into your hands, he laughed, and said there was some comfort in that too, for how many thousands and hundreds of thousands of pounds would you not give, if you had them, to know who your two-legged spaniel was.'

'You do not mean,' said Rose, turning very pale, 'to tell me that this was said in earnest?'

'He spoke in hard and angry earnest, if a man ever did,' replied the girl, shaking her head. 'He is an earnest man when his hatred is up. I know many who do worse things; but I'd rather listen to them all a dozen times, than to that Monks once. It is growing late, and I have to reach home without suspicion of having been on such an errand as this. I must get back quickly.'

'But what can I do?' said Rose. 'To what use can I turn this communication without you? Back! Why do you wish to return to companions you paint in such terrible colors? If you repeat this information to a gentleman whom I can summon in an instant from the next room, you can be consigned to some place of safety without half an hour's delay.'

'I wish to go back,' said the girl. 'I must go back, because—how can I tell such things to an innocent lady like you?—because among the men I have told you of, there is one: the most desperate among them all; that I can't leave: no, not even to be saved from the life I am leading now.'

'Your having interfered in this dear boy's behalf before,' said Rose; 'your coming here, at so great a risk, to tell me what you have heard; your manner, which convinces me of the truth of what you say; your evident contrition, and sense of shame; all lead me to believe that you might yet be reclaimed. Oh!' said the earnest girl, folding her hands as the tears coursed

down her face, ‘do not turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of one of your own sex; the first—the first, I do believe, who ever appealed to you in the voice of pity and compassion. Do hear my words, and let me save you yet, for better things.’

‘Lady,’ cried the girl, sinking on her knees, ‘dear, sweet, angel lady, you *are* the first that ever blessed me with such words as these, and if I had heard them years ago, they might have turned me from a life of sin and sorrow; but it is too late, it is too late!’

‘It is never too late,’ said Rose, ‘for penitence and atonement.’

‘It is,’ cried the girl, writhing in agony of her mind; ‘I cannot leave him now! I could not be his death.’

‘Why should you be?’ asked Rose.

‘Nothing could save him,’ cried the girl. ‘If I told others what I have told you, and led to their being taken, he would be sure to die. He is the boldest, and has been so cruel!’

‘Is it possible,’ cried Rose, ‘that for such a man as this, you can resign every future hope, and the certainty of immediate rescue? It is madness.’

‘I don’t know what it is,’ answered the girl; ‘I only know that it is so, and not with me alone, but with hundreds of others as bad and wretched as myself. I must go back. Whether it is God’s wrath for the wrong I have done, I do not know; but I am drawn back to him through every suffering and ill usage; and I should be, I believe, if I knew that I was to die by his hand at last.’

‘What am I to do?’ said Rose. ‘I should not let you depart from me thus.’

‘You should, lady, and I know you will,’ rejoined the girl, rising. ‘You will not stop my going because I have trusted in your goodness, and forced no promise from you, as I might have done.’

‘Of what use, then, is the communication you have made?’ said Rose. ‘This mystery must be investigated, or how will its disclosure to me, benefit Oliver, whom you are anxious to serve?’

‘You must have some kind gentleman about you that will hear it as a secret, and advise you what to do,’ rejoined the girl.

‘But where can I find you again when it is necessary?’ asked Rose. ‘I do not seek to know where these dreadful people live, but where will you be walking or passing at any settled period from this time?’

‘Will you promise me that you will have my secret strictly kept, and

come alone, or with the only other person that knows it; and that I shall not be watched or followed?' asked the girl.

'I promise you solemnly,' answered Rose.

'Every Sunday night, from eleven until the clock strikes twelve,' said the girl without hesitation, 'I will walk on London Bridge if I am alive.'

'Stay another moment,' interposed Rose, as the girl moved hurriedly towards the door. 'Think once again on your own condition, and the opportunity you have of escaping from it. You have a claim on me: not only as the voluntary bearer of this intelligence, but as a woman lost almost beyond redemption. Will you return to this gang of robbers, and to this man, when a word can save you? What fascination is it that can take you back, and make you cling to wickedness and misery? Oh! is there no chord in your heart that I can touch! Is there nothing left, to which I can appeal against this terrible infatuation!'

'When ladies as young, and good, and beautiful as you are,' replied the girl steadily, 'give away your hearts, love will carry you all lengths—even such as you, who have home, friends, other admirers, everything, to fill them. When such as I, who have no certain roof but the coffinlid, and no friend in sickness or death but the hospital nurse, set our rotten hearts on any man, and let him fill the place that has been a blank through all our wretched lives, who can hope to cure us? Pity us, lady—pity us for having only one feeling of the woman left, and for having that turned, by a heavy judgment, from a comfort and a pride, into a new means of violence and suffering.'

'You will,' said Rose, after a pause, 'take some money from me, which may enable you to live without dishonesty—at all events until we meet again?'

'Not a penny,' replied the girl, waving her hand.

'Do not close your heart against all my efforts to help you,' said Rose, stepping gently forward. 'I wish to serve you indeed.'

'You would serve me best, lady,' replied the girl, wringing her hands, 'if you could take my life at once; for I have felt more grief to think of what I am, to-night, than I ever did before, and it would be something not to die in the hell in which I have lived. God bless you, sweet lady, and send as much happiness on your head as I have brought shame on mine!'

Thus speaking, and sobbing aloud, the unhappy creature turned away;

while Rose Maylie, overpowered by this extraordinary interview, which had more the semblance of a rapid dream than an actual occurrence, sank into a chair, and endeavoured to collect her wandering thoughts.

CHAPTER XLI

HER SITUATION WAS, INDEED, one of no common trial and difficulty. While she felt the most eager and burning desire to penetrate the mystery in which Oliver's history was enveloped, she could not but hold sacred the confidence which the miserable woman with whom she had just conversed, had reposed in her, as a young and guileless girl. Her words and manner had touched Rose Maylie's heart; and, mingled with her love for her young charge, and scarcely less intense in its truth and fervour, was her fond wish to win the outcast back to repentance and hope.

They purposed remaining in London only three days, prior to departing for some weeks to a distant part of the coast. It was now midnight of the first day. What course of action could she determine upon, which could be adopted in eight-and-forty hours? Or how could she postpone the journey without exciting suspicion?

Mr. Losberne was with them, and would be for the next two days; but Rose was too well acquainted with the excellent gentleman's impetuosity, and foresaw too clearly the wrath with which, in the first explosion of his indignation, he would regard the instrument of Oliver's recapture, to trust him with the secret, when her representations in the girl's behalf could be seconded by no experienced person. These were all reasons for the greatest caution and most circumspect behaviour in communicating it to Mrs. Maylie, whose first impulse would infallibly be to hold a conference with the worthy doctor on the subject. As to resorting to any legal adviser, even if she had known how to do so, it was scarcely to be thought of, for the same reason. Once the thought occurred to her of seeking assistance from Harry; but this awakened the recollection of their last parting, and it seemed unworthy of her to call him back, when—the tears rose to her eyes as she pursued this train of reflection—he might have by this time learnt to forget

her, and to be happier away.

Disturbed by these different reflections; inclining now to one course and then to another, and again recoiling from all, as each successive consideration presented itself to her mind; Rose passed a sleepless and anxious night. After more communing with herself next day, she arrived at the desperate conclusion of consulting Harry.

‘If it be painful to him,’ she thought, ‘to come back here, how painful it will be to me! But perhaps he will not come; he may write, or he may come himself, and studiously abstain from meeting me—he did when he went away. I hardly thought he would; but it was better for us both.’ And here Rose dropped the pen, and turned away, as though the very paper which was to be her messenger should not see her weep.

She had taken up the same pen, and laid it down again fifty times, and had considered and reconsidered the first line of her letter without writing the first word, when Oliver, who had been walking in the streets, with Mr. Giles for a body-guard, entered the room in such breathless haste and violent agitation, as seemed to betoken some new cause of alarm.

‘What makes you look so flurried?’ asked Rose, advancing to meet him.

‘I hardly know how; I feel as if I should be choked,’ replied the boy. ‘Oh dear! To think that I should see him at last, and you should be able to know that I have told you the truth!’

‘I never thought you had told us anything but the truth,’ said Rose, soothing him. ‘But what is this?—of whom do you speak?’

‘I have seen the gentleman,’ replied Oliver, scarcely able to articulate, ‘the gentleman who was so good to me—Mr. Brownlow, that we have so often talked about.’

‘Where?’ asked Rose.

‘Getting out of a coach,’ replied Oliver, shedding tears of delight, ‘and going into a house. I didn’t speak to him—I couldn’t speak to him, for he didn’t see me, and I trembled so, that I was not able to go up to him. But Giles asked, for me, whether he lived there, and they said he did. Look here,’ said Oliver, opening a scrap of paper, ‘here it is; here’s where he lives —I’m going there directly! Oh, dear me, dear me! What shall I do when I come to see him and hear him speak again!’

With her attention not a little distracted by these and a great many other incoherent exclamations of joy, Rose read the address, which was Craven

Street, in the Strand. She very soon determined upon turning the discovery to account.

‘Quick!’ she said. ‘Tell them to fetch a hackney-coach, and be ready to go with me. I will take you there directly, without a minute’s loss of time. I will only tell my aunt that we are going out for an hour, and be ready as soon as you are.’

Oliver needed no prompting to despatch, and in little more than five minutes they were on their way to Craven Street. When they arrived there, Rose left Oliver in the coach, under pretence of preparing the old gentleman to receive him; and sending up her card by the servant, requested to see Mr. Brownlow on very pressing business. The servant soon returned, to beg that she would walk upstairs; and following him into an upper room, Miss Maylie was presented to an elderly gentleman of benevolent appearance, in a bottle-green coat. At no great distance from whom, was seated another old gentleman, in nankeen breeches and gaiters; who did not look particularly benevolent, and who was sitting with his hands clasped on the top of a thick stick, and his chin propped thereupon.

‘Dear me,’ said the gentleman, in the bottle-green coat, hastily rising with great politeness, ‘I beg your pardon, young lady—I imagined it was some importunate person who—I beg you will excuse me. Be seated, pray.’

‘Mr. Brownlow, I believe, sir?’ said Rose, glancing from the other gentleman to the one who had spoken.

‘That is my name,’ said the old gentleman. ‘This is my friend, Mr. Grimwig. Grimwig, will you leave us for a few minutes?’

‘I believe,’ interposed Miss Maylie, ‘that at this period of our interview, I need not give that gentleman the trouble of going away. If I am correctly informed, he is cognizant of the business on which I wish to speak to you.’

Mr. Brownlow inclined his head. Mr. Grimwig, who had made one very stiff bow, and risen from his chair, made another very stiff bow, and dropped into it again.

‘I shall surprise you very much, I have no doubt,’ said Rose, naturally embarrassed; ‘but you once showed great benevolence and goodness to a very dear young friend of mine, and I am sure you will take an interest in hearing of him again.’

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Brownlow.

‘Oliver Twist you knew him as,’ replied Rose.

The words no sooner escaped her lips, than Mr. Grimwig, who had been affecting to dip into a large book that lay on the table, upset it with a great crash, and falling back in his chair, discharged from his features every expression but one of unmitigated wonder, and indulged in a prolonged and vacant stare; then, as if ashamed of having betrayed so much emotion, he jerked himself, as it were, by a convulsion into his former attitude, and looking out straight before him emitted a long deep whistle, which seemed, at last, not to be discharged on empty air, but to die away in the innermost recesses of his stomach.

Mr. Browlow was no less surprised, although his astonishment was not expressed in the same eccentric manner. He drew his chair nearer to Miss Maylie's, and said,

'Do me the favour, my dear young lady, to leave entirely out of the question that goodness and benevolence of which you speak, and of which nobody else knows anything; and if you have it in your power to produce any evidence which will alter the unfavourable opinion I was once induced to entertain of that poor child, in Heaven's name put me in possession of it.'

'A bad one! I'll eat my head if he is not a bad one,' growled Mr. Grimwig, speaking by some ventriloquial power, without moving a muscle of his face.

'He is a child of a noble nature and a warm heart,' said Rose, colouring; 'and that Power which has thought fit to try him beyond his years, has planted in his breast affections and feelings which would do honour to many who have numbered his days six times over.'

'I'm only sixty-one,' said Mr. Grimwig, with the same rigid face. 'And, as the devil's in it if this Oliver is not twelve years old at least, I don't see the application of that remark.'

'Do not heed my friend, Miss Maylie,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'he does not mean what he says.'

'Yes, he does,' growled Mr. Grimwig.

'No, he does not,' said Mr. Brownlow, obviously rising in wrath as he spoke.

'He'll eat his head, if he doesn't,' growled Mr. Grimwig.

'He would deserve to have it knocked off, if he does,' said Mr. Brownlow.

'And he'd uncommonly like to see any man offer to do it,' responded

Mr. Grimwig, knocking his stick upon the floor.

Having gone thus far, the two old gentlemen severally took snuff, and afterwards shook hands, according to their invariable custom.

‘Now, Miss Maylie,’ said Mr. Brownlow, ‘to return to the subject in which your humanity is so much interested. Will you let me know what intelligence you have of this poor child: allowing me to promise that I exhausted every means in my power of discovering him, and that since I have been absent from this country, my first impression that he had imposed upon me, and had been persuaded by his former associates to rob me, has been considerably shaken.’

Rose, who had had time to collect her thoughts, at once related, in a few natural words, all that had befallen Oliver since he left Mr. Brownlow’s house; reserving Nancy’s information for that gentleman’s private ear, and concluding with the assurance that his only sorrow, for some months past, had been not being able to meet with his former benefactor and friend.

‘Thank God!’ said the old gentleman. ‘This is great happiness to me, great happiness. But you have not told me where he is now, Miss Maylie. You must pardon my finding fault with you,—but why not have brought him?’

‘He is waiting in a coach at the door,’ replied Rose.

‘At this door!’ cried the old gentleman. With which he hurried out of the room, down the stairs, up the coachsteps, and into the coach, without another word.

When the room-door closed behind him, Mr. Grimwig lifted up his head, and converting one of the hind legs of his chair into a pivot, described three distinct circles with the assistance of his stick and the table; sitting in it all the time. After performing this evolution, he rose and limped as fast as he could up and down the room at least a dozen times, and then stopping suddenly before Rose, kissed her without the slightest preface.

‘Hush!’ he said, as the young lady rose in some alarm at this unusual proceeding. ‘Don’t be afraid. I’m old enough to be your grandfather. You’re a sweet girl. I like you. Here they are!’

In fact, as he threw himself at one dexterous dive into his former seat, Mr. Brownlow returned, accompanied by Oliver, whom Mr. Grimwig received very graciously; and if the gratification of that moment had been the only reward for all her anxiety and care in Oliver’s behalf, Rose Maylie

would have been well repaid.

‘There is somebody else who should not be forgotten, by the bye,’ said Mr. Brownlow, ringing the bell. ‘Send Mrs. Bedwin here, if you please.’

The old housekeeper answered the summons with all dispatch; and dropping a curtsey at the door, waited for orders.

‘Why, you get blinder every day, Bedwin,’ said Mr. Brownlow, rather testily.

‘Well, that I do, sir,’ replied the old lady. ‘People’s eyes, at my time of life, don’t improve with age, sir.’

‘I could have told you that,’ rejoined Mr. Brownlow; ‘but put on your glasses, and see if you can’t find out what you were wanted for, will you?’

The old lady began to rummage in her pocket for her spectacles. But Oliver’s patience was not proof against this new trial; and yielding to his first impulse, he sprang into her arms.

‘God be good to me!’ cried the old lady, embracing him; ‘it is my innocent boy!’

‘My dear old nurse!’ cried Oliver.

‘He would come back—I knew he would,’ said the old lady, holding him in her arms. ‘How well he looks, and how like a gentleman’s son he is dressed again! Where have you been, this long, long while? Ah! the same sweet face, but not so pale; the same soft eye, but not so sad. I have never forgotten them or his quiet smile, but have seen them every day, side by side with those of my own dear children, dead and gone since I was a lightsome young creature.’ Running on thus, and now holding Oliver from her to mark how he had grown, now clasping him to her and passing her fingers fondly through his hair, the good soul laughed and wept upon his neck by turns.

Leaving her and Oliver to compare notes at leisure, Mr. Brownlow led the way into another room; and there, heard from Rose a full narration of her interview with Nancy, which occasioned him no little surprise and perplexity. Rose also explained her reasons for not confiding in her friend Mr. Losberne in the first instance. The old gentleman considered that she had acted prudently, and readily undertook to hold solemn conference with the worthy doctor himself. To afford him an early opportunity for the execution of this design, it was arranged that he should call at the hotel at eight o’clock that evening, and that in the meantime Mrs. Maylie should be

cautiously informed of all that had occurred. These preliminaries adjusted, Rose and Oliver returned home.

Rose had by no means overrated the measure of the good doctor's wrath. Nancy's history was no sooner unfolded to him, than he poured forth a shower of mingled threats and execrations; threatened to make her the first victim of the combined ingenuity of Messrs. Blathers and Duff; and actually put on his hat preparatory to sallying forth to obtain the assistance of those worthies. And, doubtless, he would, in this first outbreak, have carried the intention into effect without a moment's consideration of the consequences, if he had not been restrained, in part, by corresponding violence on the side of Mr. Brownlow, who was himself of an irascible temperament, and party by such arguments and representations as seemed best calculated to dissuade him from his hotbrained purpose.

'Then what the devil is to be done?' said the impetuous doctor, when they had rejoined the two ladies. 'Are we to pass a vote of thanks to all these vagabonds, male and female, and beg them to accept a hundred pounds, or so, apiece, as a trifling mark of our esteem, and some slight acknowledgment of their kindness to Oliver?'

'Not exactly that,' rejoined Mr. Brownlow, laughing; 'but we must proceed gently and with great care.'

'Gentleness and care,' exclaimed the doctor. 'I'd send them one and all to—'

'Never mind where,' interposed Mr. Brownlow. 'But reflect whether sending them anywhere is likely to attain the object we have in view.'

'What object?' asked the doctor.

'Simply, the discovery of Oliver's parentage, and regaining for him the inheritance of which, if this story be true, he has been fraudulently deprived.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Losberne, cooling himself with his pocket-handkerchief; 'I almost forgot that.'

'You see,' pursued Mr. Brownlow; 'placing this poor girl entirely out of the question, and supposing it were possible to bring these scoundrels to justice without compromising her safety, what good should we bring about?'

'Hanging a few of them at least, in all probability,' suggested the doctor, 'and transporting the rest.'

‘Very good,’ replied Mr. Brownlow, smiling; ‘but no doubt they will bring that about for themselves in the fulness of time, and if we step in to forestall them, it seems to me that we shall be performing a very Quixotic act, in direct opposition to our own interest—or at least to Oliver’s, which is the same thing.’

‘How?’ inquired the doctor.

‘Thus. It is quite clear that we shall have extreme difficulty in getting to the bottom of this mystery, unless we can bring this man, Monks, upon his knees. That can only be done by stratagem, and by catching him when he is not surrounded by these people. For, suppose he were apprehended, we have no proof against him. He is not even (so far as we know, or as the facts appear to us) concerned with the gang in any of their robberies. If he were not discharged, it is very unlikely that he could receive any further punishment than being committed to prison as a rogue and vagabond; and of course ever afterwards his mouth would be so obstinately closed that he might as well, for our purposes, be deaf, dumb, blind, and an idiot.’

‘Then,’ said the doctor impetuously, ‘I put it to you again, whether you think it reasonable that this promise to the girl should be considered binding; a promise made with the best and kindest intentions, but really—’

‘Do not discuss the point, my dear young lady, pray,’ said Mr. Brownlow, interrupting Rose as she was about to speak. ‘The promise shall be kept. I don’t think it will, in the slightest degree, interfere with our proceedings. But, before we can resolve upon any precise course of action, it will be necessary to see the girl; to ascertain from her whether she will point out this Monks, on the understanding that he is to be dealt with by us, and not by the law; or, if she will not, or cannot do that, to procure from her such an account of his haunts and description of his person, as will enable us to identify him. She cannot be seen until next Sunday night; this is Tuesday. I would suggest that in the meantime, we remain perfectly quiet, and keep these matters secret even from Oliver himself.’

Although Mr. Losberne received with many wry faces a proposal involving a delay of five whole days, he was fain to admit that no better course occurred to him just then; and as both Rose and Mrs. Maylie sided very strongly with Mr. Brownlow, that gentleman’s proposition was carried unanimously.

‘I should like,’ he said, ‘to call in the aid of my friend Grimwig. He is a

strange creature, but a shrewd one, and might prove of material assistance to us; I should say that he was bred a lawyer, and quitted the Bar in disgust because he had only one brief and a motion of course, in twenty years, though whether that is recommendation or not, you must determine for yourselves.'

'I have no objection to your calling in your friend if I may call in mine,' said the doctor.

'We must put it to the vote,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'who may he be?'

'That lady's son, and this young lady's—very old friend,' said the doctor, motioning towards Mrs. Maylie, and concluding with an expressive glance at her niece.

Rose blushed deeply, but she did not make any audible objection to this motion (possibly she felt in a hopeless minority); and Harry Maylie and Mr. Grimwig were accordingly added to the committee.

'We stay in town, of course,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'while there remains the slightest prospect of prosecuting this inquiry with a chance of success. I will spare neither trouble nor expense in behalf of the object in which we are all so deeply interested, and I am content to remain here, if it be for twelve months, so long as you assure me that any hope remains.'

'Good!' rejoined Mr. Brownlow. 'And as I see on the faces about me, a disposition to inquire how it happened that I was not in the way to corroborate Oliver's tale, and had so suddenly left the kingdom, let me stipulate that I shall be asked no questions until such time as I may deem it expedient to forestall them by telling my own story. Believe me, I make this request with good reason, for I might otherwise excite hopes destined never to be realised, and only increase difficulties and disappointments already quite numerous enough. Come! Supper has been announced, and young Oliver, who is all alone in the next room, will have begun to think, by this time, that we have wearied of his company, and entered into some dark conspiracy to thrust him forth upon the world.'

With these words, the old gentleman gave his hand to Mrs. Maylie, and escorted her into the supper-room. Mr. Losberne followed, leading Rose; and the council was, for the present, effectually broken up.

CHAPTER XLII

UPON THE NIGHT WHEN Nancy, having lulled Mr. Sikes to sleep, hurried on her self-imposed mission to Rose Maylie, there advanced towards London, by the Great North Road, two persons, upon whom it is expedient that this history should bestow some attention.

They were a man and woman; or perhaps they would be better described as a male and female: for the former was one of those long-limbed, knock-kneed, shambling, bony people, to whom it is difficult to assign any precise age,—looking as they do, when they are yet boys, like undergrown men, and when they are almost men, like overgrown boys. The woman was young, but of a robust and hardy make, as she need have been to bear the weight of the heavy bundle which was strapped to her back. Her companion was not encumbered with much luggage, as there merely dangled from a stick which he carried over his shoulder, a small parcel wrapped in a common handkerchief, and apparently light enough. This circumstance, added to the length of his legs, which were of unusual extent, enabled him with much ease to keep some half-dozen paces in advance of his companion, to whom he occasionally turned with an impatient jerk of the head: as if reproaching her tardiness, and urging her to greater exertion.

Thus, they had toiled along the dusty road, taking little heed of any object within sight, save when they stepped aside to allow a wider passage for the mail-coaches which were whirling out of town, until they passed through Highgate archway; when the foremost traveller stopped and called impatiently to his companion,

‘Come on, can’t yer? What a lazybones yer are, Charlotte.’

‘It’s a heavy load, I can tell you,’ said the female, coming up, almost breathless with fatigue.

‘Heavy! What are yer talking about? What are yer made for?’ rejoined

the male traveller, changing his own little bundle as he spoke, to the other shoulder. ‘Oh, there yer are, resting again! Well, if yer ain’t enough to tire anybody’s patience out, I don’t know what is!’

‘Is it much farther?’ asked the woman, resting herself against a bank, and looking up with the perspiration streaming from her face.

‘Much farther! Yer as good as there,’ said the long-legged tramper, pointing out before him. ‘Look there! Those are the lights of London.’

‘They’re a good two mile off, at least,’ said the woman despondingly.

‘Never mind whether they’re two mile off, or twenty,’ said Noah Claypole; for he it was; ‘but get up and come on, or I’ll kick yer, and so I give yer notice.’

As Noah’s red nose grew redder with anger, and as he crossed the road while speaking, as if fully prepared to put his threat into execution, the woman rose without any further remark, and trudged onward by his side.

‘Where do you mean to stop for the night, Noah?’ she asked, after they had walked a few hundred yards.

‘How should I know?’ replied Noah, whose temper had been considerably impaired by walking.

‘Near, I hope,’ said Charlotte.

‘No, not near,’ replied Mr. Claypole. ‘There! Not near; so don’t think it.’

‘Why not?’

‘When I tell yer that I don’t mean to do a thing, that’s enough, without any why or because either,’ replied Mr. Claypole with dignity.

‘Well, you needn’t be so cross,’ said his companion.

‘A pretty thing it would be, wouldn’t it to go and stop at the very first public-house outside the town, so that Sowerberry, if he come up after us, might poke in his old nose, and have us taken back in a cart with handcuffs on,’ said Mr. Claypole in a jeering tone. ‘No! I shall go and lose myself among the narrowest streets I can find, and not stop till we come to the very out-of-the-wayest house I can set eyes on. ‘Cod, yer may thanks yer stars I’ve got a head; for if we hadn’t gone, at first, the wrong road a purpose, and come back across country, yer’d have been locked up hard and fast a week ago, my lady. And serve yer right for being a fool.’

‘I know I ain’t as cunning as you are,’ replied Charlotte; ‘but don’t put all the blame on me, and say I should have been locked up. You would have been if I had been, any way.’

‘Yer took the money from the till, yer know yer did,’ said Mr. Claypole.

‘I took it for you, Noah, dear,’ rejoined Charlotte.

‘Did I keep it?’ asked Mr. Claypole.

‘No; you trusted in me, and let me carry it like a dear, and so you are,’ said the lady, chucking him under the chin, and drawing her arm through his.

This was indeed the case; but as it was not Mr. Claypole’s habit to repose a blind and foolish confidence in anybody, it should be observed, in justice to that gentleman, that he had trusted Charlotte to this extent, in order that, if they were pursued, the money might be found on her: which would leave him an opportunity of asserting his innocence of any theft, and would greatly facilitate his chances of escape. Of course, he entered at this juncture, into no explanation of his motives, and they walked on very lovingly together.

In pursuance of this cautious plan, Mr. Claypole went on, without halting, until he arrived at the Angel at Islington, where he wisely judged, from the crowd of passengers and numbers of vehicles, that London began in earnest. Just pausing to observe which appeared the most crowded streets, and consequently the most to be avoided, he crossed into Saint John’s Road, and was soon deep in the obscurity of the intricate and dirty ways, which, lying between Gray’s Inn Lane and Smithfield, render that part of the town one of the lowest and worst that improvement has left in the midst of London.

Through these streets, Noah Claypole walked, dragging Charlotte after him; now stepping into the kennel to embrace at a glance the whole external character of some small public-house; now jogging on again, as some fancied appearance induced him to believe it too public for his purpose. At length, he stopped in front of one, more humble in appearance and more dirty than any he had yet seen; and, having crossed over and surveyed it from the opposite pavement, graciously announced his intention of putting up there, for the night.

‘So give us the bundle,’ said Noah, unstrapping it from the woman’s shoulders, and slinging it over his own; ‘and don’t yer speak, except when yer spoke to. What’s the name of the house—t-h-r—three what?’

‘Cripples,’ said Charlotte.

‘Three Cripples,’ repeated Noah, ‘and a very good sign too. Now, then!

Keep close at my heels, and come along.’ With these injunctions, he pushed the rattling door with his shoulder, and entered the house, followed by his companion.

There was nobody in the bar but a young Jew, who, with his two elbows on the counter, was reading a dirty newspaper. He stared very hard at Noah, and Noah stared very hard at him.

If Noah had been attired in his charity-boy’s dress, there might have been some reason for the Jew opening his eyes so wide; but as he had discarded the coat and badge, and wore a short smock-frock over his leathers, there seemed no particular reason for his appearance exciting so much attention in a public-house.

‘Is this the Three Cripples?’ asked Noah.

‘That is the dabe of this ’ouse,’ replied the Jew.

‘A gentleman we met on the road, coming up from the country, recommended us here,’ said Noah, nudging Charlotte, perhaps to call her attention to this most ingenious device for attracting respect, and perhaps to warn her to betray no surprise. ‘We want to sleep here to-night.’

‘I’b dot certaid you cad,’ said Barney, who was the attendant sprite; ‘but I’ll idquire.’

‘Show us the tap, and give us a bit of cold meat and a drop of beer while yer inquiring, will yer?’ said Noah.

Barney complied by ushering them into a small back-room, and setting the required viands before them; having done which, he informed the travellers that they could be lodged that night, and left the amiable couple to their refreshment.

Now, this back-room was immediately behind the bar, and some steps lower, so that any person connected with the house, undrawing a small curtain which concealed a single pane of glass fixed in the wall of the last-named apartment, about five feet from its flooring, could not only look down upon any guests in the back-room without any great hazard of being observed (the glass being in a dark angle of the wall, between which and a large upright beam the observer had to thrust himself), but could, by applying his ear to the partition, ascertain with tolerable distinctness, their subject of conversation. The landlord of the house had not withdrawn his eye from this place of espial for five minutes, and Barney had only just returned from making the communication above related, when Fagin, in the

course of his evening’s business, came into the bar to inquire after some of his young pupils.

‘Hush!’ said Barney: ‘stradegers id the next roob.’

‘Strangers!’ repeated the old man in a whisper.

‘Ah! Ad rub uds too,’ added Barney. ‘Frob the cuttry, but subthig in your way, or I’b bistaked.’

Fagin appeared to receive this communication with great interest.

Mounting a stool, he cautiously applied his eye to the pane of glass, from which secret post he could see Mr. Claypole taking cold beef from the dish, and porter from the pot, and administering homeopathic doses of both to Charlotte, who sat patiently by, eating and drinking at his pleasure.

‘Aha!’ he whispered, looking round to Barney, ‘I like that fellow’s looks. He’d be of use to us; he knows how to train the girl already. Don’t make as much noise as a mouse, my dear, and let me hear ’em talk—let me hear ’em.’

He again applied his eye to the glass, and turning his ear to the partition, listened attentively: with a subtle and eager look upon his face, that might have appertained to some old goblin.

‘So I mean to be a gentleman,’ said Mr. Claypole, kicking out his legs, and continuing a conversation, the commencement of which Fagin had arrived too late to hear. ‘No more jolly old coffins, Charlotte, but a gentleman’s life for me: and, if yer like, yer shall be a lady.’

‘I should like that well enough, dear,’ replied Charlotte; ‘but tills ain’t to be emptied every day, and people to get clear off after it.’

‘Tills be blowed!’ said Mr. Claypole; ‘there’s more things besides tills to be emptied.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked his companion.

‘Pockets, women’s ridicules, houses, mail-coaches, banks!’ said Mr. Claypole, rising with the porter.

‘But you can’t do all that, dear,’ said Charlotte.

‘I shall look out to get into company with them as can,’ replied Noah. ‘They’ll be able to make us useful some way or another. Why, you yourself are worth fifty women; I never see such a precious sly and deceitful creetur as yer can be when I let yer.’

‘Lor, how nice it is to hear yer say so!’ exclaimed Charlotte, imprinting a kiss upon his ugly face.

‘There, that’ll do: don’t yer be too affectionate, in case I’m cross with yer,’ said Noah, disengaging himself with great gravity. ‘I should like to be the captain of some band, and have the whopping of ’em, and follering ’em about, unbeknown to themselves. That would suit me, if there was good profit; and if we could only get in with some gentleman of this sort, I say it would be cheap at that twenty-pound note you’ve got,—especially as we don’t very well know how to get rid of it ourselves.’

After expressing this opinion, Mr. Claypole looked into the porter-pot with an aspect of deep wisdom; and having well shaken its contents, nodded condescendingly to Charlotte, and took a draught, wherewith he appeared greatly refreshed. He was meditating another, when the sudden opening of the door, and the appearance of a stranger, interrupted him.

The stranger was Mr. Fagin. And very amiable he looked, and a very low bow he made, as he advanced, and setting himself down at the nearest table, ordered something to drink of the grinning Barney.

‘A pleasant night, sir, but cool for the time of year,’ said Fagin, rubbing his hands. ‘From the country, I see, sir?’

‘How do yer see that?’ asked Noah Claypole.

‘We have not so much dust as that in London,’ replied Fagin, pointing from Noah’s shoes to those of his companion, and from them to the two bundles.

‘Yer a sharp feller,’ said Noah. ‘Ha! ha! only hear that, Charlotte!’

‘Why, one need be sharp in this town, my dear,’ replied the Jew, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper; ‘and that’s the truth.’

Fagin followed up this remark by striking the side of his nose with his right forefinger,—a gesture which Noah attempted to imitate, though not with complete success, in consequence of his own nose not being large enough for the purpose. However, Mr. Fagin seemed to interpret the endeavour as expressing a perfect coincidence with his opinion, and put about the liquor which Barney reappeared with, in a very friendly manner.

‘Good stuff that,’ observed Mr. Claypole, smacking his lips.

‘Dear!’ said Fagin. ‘A man need be always emptying a till, or a pocket, or a woman’s reticule, or a house, or a mail-coach, or a bank, if he drinks it regularly.’

Mr. Claypole no sooner heard this extract from his own remarks than he fell back in his chair, and looked from the Jew to Charlotte with a

countenance of ashy paleness and excessive terror.

‘Don’t mind me, my dear,’ said Fagin, drawing his chair closer. ‘Ha! ha! it was lucky it was only me that heard you by chance. It was very lucky it was only me.’

‘I didn’t take it,’ stammered Noah, no longer stretching out his legs like an independent gentleman, but coiling them up as well as he could under his chair; ‘it was all her doing; yer’ve got it now, Charlotte, yer know yer have.’

‘No matter who’s got it, or who did it, my dear,’ replied Fagin, glancing, nevertheless, with a hawk’s eye at the girl and the two bundles. ‘I’m in that way myself, and I like you for it.’

‘In what way?’ asked Mr. Claypole, a little recovering.

‘In that way of business,’ rejoined Fagin; ‘and so are the people of the house. You’ve hit the right nail upon the head, and are as safe here as you could be. There is not a safer place in all this town than is the Cripples; that is, when I like to make it so. And I have taken a fancy to you and the young woman; so I’ve said the word, and you may make your minds easy.’

Noah Claypole’s mind might have been at ease after this assurance, but his body certainly was not; for he shuffled and writhed about, into various uncouth positions: eyeing his new friend meanwhile with mingled fear and suspicion.

‘I’ll tell you more,’ said Fagin, after he had reassured the girl, by dint of friendly nods and muttered encouragements. ‘I have got a friend that I think can gratify your darling wish, and put you in the right way, where you can take whatever department of the business you think will suit you best at first, and be taught all the others.’

‘Yer speak as if yer were in earnest,’ replied Noah.

‘What advantage would it be to me to be anything else?’ inquired Fagin, shrugging his shoulders. ‘Here! Let me have a word with you outside.’

‘There’s no occasion to trouble ourselves to move,’ said Noah, getting his legs by gradual degrees abroad again. ‘She’ll take the luggage upstairs the while. Charlotte, see to them bundles.’

This mandate, which had been delivered with great majesty, was obeyed without the slightest demur; and Charlotte made the best of her way off with the packages while Noah held the door open and watched her out.

‘She’s kept tolerably well under, ain’t she?’ he asked as he resumed his

seat: in the tone of a keeper who had tamed some wild animal.

‘Quite perfect,’ rejoined Fagin, clapping him on the shoulder. ‘You’re a genius, my dear.’

‘Why, I suppose if I wasn’t, I shouldn’t be here,’ replied Noah. ‘But, I say, she’ll be back if yer lose time.’

‘Now, what do you think?’ said Fagin. ‘If you was to like my friend, could you do better than join him?’

‘Is he in a good way of business; that’s where it is!’ responded Noah, winking one of his little eyes.

‘The top of the tree; employs a power of hands; has the very best society in the profession.’

‘Regular town-maders?’ asked Mr. Claypole.

‘Not a countryman among ’em; and I don’t think he’d take you, even on my recommendation, if he didn’t run rather short of assistants just now,’ replied Fagin.

‘Should I have to hand over?’ said Noah, slapping his breeches-pocket.

‘It couldn’t possibly be done without,’ replied Fagin, in a most decided manner.

‘Twenty pound, though—it’s a lot of money!’

‘Not when it’s in a note you can’t get rid of,’ retorted Fagin. ‘Number and date taken, I suppose? Payment stopped at the Bank? Ah! It’s not worth much to him. It’ll have to go abroad, and he couldn’t sell it for a great deal in the market.’

‘When could I see him?’ asked Noah doubtfully.

‘To-morrow morning.’

‘Where?’

‘Here.’

‘Um!’ said Noah. ‘What’s the wages?’

‘Live like a gentleman—board and lodging, pipes and spirits free—half of all you earn, and half of all the young woman earns,’ replied Mr. Fagin.

Whether Noah Claypole, whose rapacity was none of the least comprehensive, would have acceded even to these glowing terms, had he been a perfectly free agent, is very doubtful; but as he recollected that, in the event of his refusal, it was in the power of his new acquaintance to give him up to justice immediately (and more unlikely things had come to pass), he gradually relented, and said he thought that would suit him.

‘But, yer see,’ observed Noah, ‘as she will be able to do a good deal, I should like to take something very light.’

‘A little fancy work?’ suggested Fagin.

‘Ah! something of that sort,’ replied Noah. ‘What do you think would suit me now? Something not too trying for the strength, and not very dangerous, you know. That’s the sort of thing!’

‘I heard you talk of something in the spy way upon the others, my dear,’ said Fagin. ‘My friend wants somebody who would do that well, very much.’

‘Why, I did mention that, and I shouldn’t mind turning my hand to it sometimes,’ rejoined Mr. Claypole slowly; ‘but it wouldn’t pay by itself, you know.’

‘That’s true!’ observed the Jew, ruminating or pretending to ruminate. ‘No, it might not.’

‘What do you think, then?’ asked Noah, anxiously regarding him. ‘Something in the sneaking way, where it was pretty sure work, and not much more risk than being at home.’

‘What do you think of the old ladies?’ asked Fagin. ‘There’s a good deal of money made in snatching their bags and parcels, and running round the corner.’

‘Don’t they holler out a good deal, and scratch sometimes?’ asked Noah, shaking his head. ‘I don’t think that would answer my purpose. Ain’t there any other line open?’

‘Stop!’ said Fagin, laying his hand on Noah’s knee. ‘The kinchin lay.’

‘What’s that?’ demanded Mr. Claypole.

‘The kinchins, my dear,’ said Fagin, ‘is the young children that’s sent on errands by their mothers, with sixpences and shillings; and the lay is just to take their money away—they’ve always got it ready in their hands,—then knock ’em into the kennel, and walk off very slow, as if there were nothing else the matter but a child fallen down and hurt itself. Ha! ha! ha!’

‘Ha! ha!’ roared Mr. Claypole, kicking up his legs in an ecstasy. ‘Lord, that’s the very thing!’

‘To be sure it is,’ replied Fagin; ‘and you can have a few good beats chalked out in Camden Town, and Battle Bridge, and neighborhoods like that, where they’re always going errands; and you can upset as many kinchins as you want, any hour in the day. Ha! ha! ha!’

With this, Fagin poked Mr. Claypole in the side, and they joined in a burst of laughter both long and loud.

‘Well, that’s all right!’ said Noah, when he had recovered himself, and Charlotte had returned. ‘What time to-morrow shall we say?’

‘Will ten do?’ asked Fagin, adding, as Mr. Claypole nodded assent, ‘What name shall I tell my good friend.’

‘Mr. Bolter,’ replied Noah, who had prepared himself for such emergency. ‘Mr. Morris Bolter. This is Mrs. Bolter.’

‘Mrs. Bolter’s humble servant,’ said Fagin, bowing with grotesque politeness. ‘I hope I shall know her better very shortly.’

‘Do you hear the gentleman, Charlotte?’ thundered Mr. Claypole.

‘Yes, Noah, dear!’ replied Mrs. Bolter, extending her hand.

‘She calls me Noah, as a sort of fond way of talking,’ said Mr. Morris Bolter, late Claypole, turning to Fagin. ‘You understand?’

‘Oh yes, I understand—perfectly,’ replied Fagin, telling the truth for once. ‘Good-night! Good-night!’

With many adieus and good wishes, Mr. Fagin went his way. Noah Claypole, bespeaking his good lady’s attention, proceeded to enlighten her relative to the arrangement he had made, with all that haughtiness and air of superiority, becoming, not only a member of the sterner sex, but a gentleman who appreciated the dignity of a special appointment on the kinchin lay, in London and its vicinity.

CHAPTER XLIII

‘AND SO IT WAS you that was your own friend, was it?’ asked Mr. Claypole, otherwise Bolter, when, by virtue of the compact entered into between them, he had removed next day to Fagin’s house. ‘God, I thought as much last night!’

‘Every man’s his own friend, my dear,’ replied Fagin, with his most insinuating grin. ‘He hasn’t as good a one as himself anywhere.’

‘Except sometimes,’ replied Morris Bolter, assuming the air of a man of the world. ‘Some people are nobody’s enemies but their own, yer know.’

‘Don’t believe that,’ said Fagin. ‘When a man’s his own enemy, it’s only because he’s too much his own friend; not because he’s careful for everybody but himself. Pooh! pooh! There ain’t such a thing in nature.’

‘There oughn’t to be, if there is,’ replied Mr. Bolter.

‘That stands to reason. Some conjurers say that number three is the magic number, and some say number seven. It’s neither, my friend, neither. It’s number one.

‘Ha! ha!’ cried Mr. Bolter. ‘Number one for ever.’

‘In a little community like ours, my dear,’ said Fagin, who felt it necessary to qualify this position, ‘we have a general number one, without considering me too as the same, and all the other young people.’

‘Oh, the devil!’ exclaimed Mr. Bolter.

‘You see,’ pursued Fagin, affecting to disregard this interruption, ‘we are so mixed up together, and identified in our interests, that it must be so. For instance, it’s your object to take care of number one—meaning yourself.’

‘Certainly,’ replied Mr. Bolter. ‘Yer about right there.’

‘Well! You can’t take care of yourself, number one, without taking care of me, number one.’

‘Number two, you mean,’ said Mr. Bolter, who was largely endowed

with the quality of selfishness.

‘No, I don’t!’ retorted Fagin. ‘I’m of the same importance to you, as you are to yourself.’

‘I say,’ interrupted Mr. Bolter, ‘yer a very nice man, and I’m very fond of yer; but we ain’t quite so thick together, as all that comes to.’

‘Only think,’ said Fagin, shrugging his shoulders, and stretching out his hands; ‘only consider. You’ve done what’s a very pretty thing, and what I love you for doing; but what at the same time would put the cravat round your throat, that’s so very easily tied and so very difficult to unloose—in plain English, the halter!’

Mr. Bolter put his hand to his neckerchief, as if he felt it inconveniently tight; and murmured an assent, qualified in tone but not in substance.

‘The gallows,’ continued Fagin, ‘the gallows, my dear, is an ugly finger-post, which points out a very short and sharp turning that has stopped many a bold fellow’s career on the broad highway. To keep in the easy road, and keep it at a distance, is object number one with you.’

‘Of course it is,’ replied Mr. Bolter. ‘What do yer talk about such things for?’

‘Only to show you my meaning clearly,’ said the Jew, raising his eyebrows. ‘To be able to do that, you depend upon me. To keep my little business all snug, I depend upon you. The first is your number one, the second my number one. The more you value your number one, the more careful you must be of mine; so we come at last to what I told you at first—that a regard for number one holds us all together, and must do so, unless we would all go to pieces in company.’

‘That’s true,’ rejoined Mr. Bolter, thoughtfully. ‘Oh! yer a cunning old codger!’

Mr. Fagin saw, with delight, that this tribute to his powers was no mere compliment, but that he had really impressed his recruit with a sense of his wily genius, which it was most important that he should entertain in the outset of their acquaintance. To strengthen an impression so desirable and useful, he followed up the blow by acquainting him, in some detail, with the magnitude and extent of his operations; blending truth and fiction together, as best served his purpose; and bringing both to bear, with so much art, that Mr. Bolter’s respect visibly increased, and became tempered, at the same time, with a degree of wholesome fear, which it was highly desirable to

awaken.

‘It’s this mutual trust we have in each other that consoles me under heavy losses,’ said Fagin. ‘My best hand was taken from me, yesterday morning.’

‘You don’t mean to say he died?’ cried Mr. Bolter.

‘No, no,’ replied Fagin, ‘not so bad as that. Not quite so bad.’

‘What, I suppose he was—’

‘Wanted,’ interposed Fagin. ‘Yes, he was wanted.’

‘Very particular?’ inquired Mr. Bolter.

‘No,’ replied Fagin, ‘not very. He was charged with attempting to pick a pocket, and they found a silver snuff-box on him,—his own, my dear, his own, for he took snuff himself, and was very fond of it. They remanded him till to-day, for they thought they knew the owner. Ah! he was worth fifty boxes, and I’d give the price of as many to have him back. You should have known the Dodger, my dear; you should have known the Dodger.’

‘Well, but I shall know him, I hope; don’t yer think so?’ said Mr. Bolter.

‘I’m doubtful about it,’ replied Fagin, with a sigh. ‘If they don’t get any fresh evidence, it’ll only be a summary conviction, and we shall have him back again after six weeks or so; but, if they do, it’s a case of lagging. They know what a clever lad he is; he’ll be a lifer. They’ll make the Artful nothing less than a lifer.’

‘What do you mean by lagging and a lifer?’ demanded Mr. Bolter. ‘What’s the good of talking in that way to me; why don’t yer speak so as I can understand yer?’

Fagin was about to translate these mysterious expressions into the vulgar tongue; and, being interpreted, Mr. Bolter would have been informed that they represented that combination of words, ‘transportation for life,’ when the dialogue was cut short by the entry of Master Bates, with his hands in his breeches-pockets, and his face twisted into a look of semi-comical woe.

‘It’s all up, Fagin,’ said Charley, when he and his new companion had been made known to each other.

‘What do you mean?’

‘They’ve found the gentleman as owns the box; two or three more’s a coming to ’dentify him; and the Artful’s booked for a passage out,’ replied Master Bates. ‘I must have a full suit of mourning, Fagin, and a hatband, to wisit him in, afore he sets out upon his travels. To think of Jack Dawkins—

lummy Jack—the Dodger—the Artful Dodger—going abroad for a common twopenny-halfpenny sneeze-box! I never thought he'd a done it under a gold watch, chain, and seals, at the lowest. Oh, why didn't he rob some rich old gentleman of all his walables, and go out as a gentleman, and not like a common prig, without no honour nor glory!'

With this expression of feeling for his unfortunate friend, Master Bates sat himself on the nearest chair with an aspect of chagrin and despondency.

'What do you talk about his having neither honour nor glory for!' exclaimed Fagin, darting an angry look at his pupil. 'Wasn't he always the top-sawyer among you all! Is there one of you that could touch him or come near him on any scent! Eh?'

'Not one,' replied Master Bates, in a voice rendered husky by regret; 'not one.'

'Then what do you talk of?' replied Fagin angrily; 'what are you blubbering for?'

''Cause it isn't on the record, is it?' said Charley, chafed into perfect defiance of his venerable friend by the current of his regrets; ''cause it can't come out in the 'dictment; 'cause nobody will never know half of what he was. How will he stand in the Newgate Calendar? P'raps not be there at all. Oh, my eye, my eye, wot a blow it is!'

'Ha! ha!' cried Fagin, extending his right hand, and turning to Mr. Bolter in a fit of chuckling which shook him as though he had the palsy; 'see what a pride they take in their profession, my dear. Ain't it beautiful?'

Mr. Bolter nodded assent, and Fagin, after contemplating the grief of Charley Bates for some seconds with evident satisfaction, stepped up to that young gentleman and patted him on the shoulder.

'Never mind, Charley,' said Fagin soothingly; 'it'll come out, it'll be sure to come out. They'll all know what a clever fellow he was; he'll show it himself, and not disgrace his old pals and teachers. Think how young he is too! What a distinction, Charley, to be lagged at his time of life!'

'Well, it is a honour that is!' said Charley, a little consoled.

'He shall have all he wants,' continued the Jew. 'He shall be kept in the Stone Jug, Charley, like a gentleman. Like a gentleman! With his beer every day, and money in his pocket to pitch and toss with, if he can't spend it.'

'No, shall he though?' cried Charley Bates.

'Ay, that he shall,' replied Fagin, 'and we'll have a big-wig, Charley: one

that’s got the greatest gift of the gab: to carry on his defence; and he shall make a speech for himself too, if he likes; and we’ll read it all in the papers —“Artful Dodger—shrieks of laughter—here the court was convulsed”—eh, Charley, eh?’

‘Ha! ha!’ laughed Master Bates, ‘what a lark that would be, wouldn’t it, Fagin? I say, how the Artful would bother ’em wouldn’t he?’

‘Would!’ cried Fagin. ‘He shall—he will!’

‘Ah, to be sure, so he will,’ repeated Charley, rubbing his hands.

‘I think I see him now,’ cried the Jew, bending his eyes upon his pupil.

‘So do I,’ cried Charley Bates. ‘Ha! ha! ha! so do I. I see it all afore me, upon my soul I do, Fagin. What a game! What a regular game! All the big-wigs trying to look solemn, and Jack Dawkins addressing of ’em as intimate and comfortable as if he was the judge’s own son making a speech arter dinner—ha! ha! ha!’

In fact, Mr. Fagin had so well humoured his young friend’s eccentric disposition, that Master Bates, who had at first been disposed to consider the imprisoned Dodger rather in the light of a victim, now looked upon him as the chief actor in a scene of most uncommon and exquisite humour, and felt quite impatient for the arrival of the time when his old companion should have so favourable an opportunity of displaying his abilities.

‘We must know how he gets on to-day, by some handy means or other,’ said Fagin. ‘Let me think.’

‘Shall I go?’ asked Charley.

‘Not for the world,’ replied Fagin. ‘Are you mad, my dear, stark mad, that you’d walk into the very place where—No, Charley, no. One is enough to lose at a time.’

‘You don’t mean to go yourself, I suppose?’ said Charley with a humorous leer.

‘That wouldn’t quite fit,’ replied Fagin shaking his head.

‘Then why don’t you send this new cove?’ asked Master Bates, laying his hand on Noah’s arm. ‘Nobody knows him.’

‘Why, if he didn’t mind—’ observed Fagin.

‘Mind!’ interposed Charley. ‘What should he have to mind?’

‘Really nothing, my dear,’ said Fagin, turning to Mr. Bolter, ‘really nothing.’

‘Oh, I dare say about that, yer know,’ observed Noah, backing towards

the door, and shaking his head with a kind of sober alarm. ‘No, no—none of that. It’s not in my department, that ain’t.’

‘Wot department has he got, Fagin?’ inquired Master Bates, surveying Noah’s lank form with much disgust. ‘The cutting away when there’s anything wrong, and the eating all the wittles when there’s everything right; is that his branch?’

‘Never mind,’ retorted Mr. Bolter; ‘and don’t yer take liberties with yer superiors, little boy, or yer’ll find yerself in the wrong shop.’

Master Bates laughed so vehemently at this magnificent threat, that it was some time before Fagin could interpose, and represent to Mr. Bolter that he incurred no possible danger in visiting the police-office; that, inasmuch as no account of the little affair in which he had engaged, nor any description of his person, had yet been forwarded to the metropolis, it was very probable that he was not even suspected of having resorted to it for shelter; and that, if he were properly disguised, it would be as safe a spot for him to visit as any in London, inasmuch as it would be, of all places, the very last, to which he could be supposed likely to resort of his own free will.

Persuaded, in part, by these representations, but overborne in a much greater degree by his fear of Fagin, Mr. Bolter at length consented, with a very bad grace, to undertake the expedition. By Fagin’s directions, he immediately substituted for his own attire, a waggoner’s frock, velveteen breeches, and leather leggings: all of which articles the Jew had at hand. He was likewise furnished with a felt hat well garnished with turnpike tickets; and a carter’s whip. Thus equipped, he was to saunter into the office, as some country fellow from Covent Garden market might be supposed to do for the gratification of his curiousity; and as he was as awkward, ungainly, and raw-boned a fellow as need be, Mr. Fagin had no fear but that he would look the part to perfection.

These arrangements completed, he was informed of the necessary signs and tokens by which to recognise the Artful Dodger, and was conveyed by Master Bates through dark and winding ways to within a very short distance of Bow Street. Having described the precise situation of the office, and accompanied it with copious directions how he was to walk straight up the passage, and when he got into the side, and pull off his hat as he went into the room, Charley Bates bade him hurry on alone, and promised to bide his

return on the spot of their parting.

Noah Claypole, or Morris Bolter as the reader pleases, punctually followed the directions he had received, which—Master Bates being pretty well acquainted with the locality—were so exact that he was enabled to gain the magisterial presence without asking any question, or meeting with any interruption by the way.

He found himself jostled among a crowd of people, chiefly women, who were huddled together in a dirty frowsy room, at the upper end of which was a raised platform railed off from the rest, with a dock for the prisoners on the left hand against the wall, a box for the witnesses in the middle, and a desk for the magistrates on the right; the awful locality last named, being screened off by a partition which concealed the bench from the common gaze, and left the vulgar to imagine (if they could) the full majesty of justice.

There were only a couple of women in the dock, who were nodding to their admiring friends, while the clerk read some depositions to a couple of policemen and a man in plain clothes who leant over the table. A jailer stood reclining against the dock-rail, tapping his nose listlessly with a large key, except when he repressed an undue tendency to conversation among the idlers, by proclaiming silence; or looked sternly up to bid some woman ‘Take that baby out,’ when the gravity of justice was disturbed by feeble cries, half-smothered in the mother’s shawl, from some meagre infant. The room smelt close and unwholesome; the walls were dirt-discoloured; and the ceiling blackened. There was an old smoky bust over the mantel-shelf, and a dusty clock above the dock—the only thing present, that seemed to go on as it ought; for depravity, or poverty, or an habitual acquaintance with both, had left a taint on all the animate matter, hardly less unpleasant than the thick greasy scum on every inanimate object that frowned upon it.

Noah looked eagerly about him for the Dodger; but although there were several women who would have done very well for that distinguished character’s mother or sister, and more than one man who might be supposed to bear a strong resemblance to his father, nobody at all answering the description given him of Mr. Dawkins was to be seen. He waited in a state of much suspense and uncertainty until the women, being committed for trial, went flaunting out; and then was quickly relieved by the appearance of another prisoner who he felt at once could be no other than the object of his

visit.

It was indeed Mr. Dawkins, who, shuffling into the office with the big coat sleeves tucked up as usual, his left hand in his pocket, and his hat in his right hand, preceded the jailer, with a rolling gait altogether indescribable, and, taking his place in the dock, requested in an audible voice to know what he was placed in that ’ere disgraceful sitivation for.

‘Hold your tongue, will you?’ said the jailer.

‘I’m an Englishman, ain’t I?’ rejoined the Dodger. ‘Where are my priwileges?’

‘You’ll get your privileges soon enough,’ retorted the jailer, ‘and pepper with ’em.’

‘We’ll see wot the Secretary of State for the Home Affairs has got to say to the beaks, if I don’t,’ replied Mr. Dawkins. ‘Now then! Wot is this here business? I shall thank the madg’strates to dispose of this here little affair, and not to keep me while they read the paper, for I’ve got an appointment with a genelman in the City, and as I am a man of my word and wery punctual in business matters, he’ll go away if I ain’t there to my time, and then pr’aps ther won’t be an action for damage against them as kep me away. Oh no, certainly not!’

At this point, the Dodger, with a show of being very particular with a view to proceedings to be had thereafter, desired the jailer to communicate ‘the names of them two files as was on the bench.’ Which so tickled the spectators, that they laughed almost as heartily as Master Bates could have done if he had heard the request.

‘Silence there!’ cried the jailer.

‘What is this?’ inquired one of the magistrates.

‘A pick-pocketing case, your worship.’

‘Has the boy ever been here before?’

‘He ought to have been, a many times,’ replied the jailer. ‘He has been pretty well everywhere else. *I* know him well, your worship.’

‘Oh! you know me, do you?’ cried the Artful, making a note of the statement. ‘Wery good. That’s a case of deformation of character, any way.’

Here there was another laugh, and another cry of silence.

‘Now then, where are the witnesses?’ said the clerk.

‘Ah! that’s right,’ added the Dodger. ‘Where are they? I should like to see ’em.’

This wish was immediately gratified, for a policeman stepped forward who had seen the prisoner attempt the pocket of an unknown gentleman in a crowd, and indeed take a handkerchief therefrom, which, being a very old one, he deliberately put back again, after trying it on his own countenance. For this reason, he took the Dodger into custody as soon as he could get near him, and the said Dodger, being searched, had upon his person a silver snuff-box, with the owner's name engraved upon the lid. This gentleman had been discovered on reference to the Court Guide, and being then and there present, swore that the snuff-box was his, and that he had missed it on the previous day, the moment he had disengaged himself from the crowd before referred to. He had also remarked a young gentleman in the throng, particularly active in making his way about, and that young gentleman was the prisoner before him.

'Have you anything to ask this witness, boy?' said the magistrate.

'I wouldn't abase myself by descending to hold no conversation with him,' replied the Dodger.

'Have you anything to say at all?'

'Do you hear his worship ask if you've anything to say?' inquired the jailer, nudging the silent Dodger with his elbow.

'I beg your pardon,' said the Dodger, looking up with an air of abstraction. 'Did you redress yourself to me, my man?'

'I never see such an out-and-out young wagabond, your worship,' observed the officer with a grin. 'Do you mean to say anything, you young shaver?'

'No,' replied the Dodger, 'not here, for this ain't the shop for justice: besides which, my attorney is a-breakfasting this morning with the Wice President of the House of Commons; but I shall have something to say elsewhere, and so will he, and so will a wery numerous and 'spectable circle of acquaintance as'll make them beaks wish they'd never been born, or that they'd got their footmen to hang 'em up to their own hat-pegs, afore they let 'em come out this morning to try it on upon me. I'll—'

'There! He's fully committed!' interposed the clerk. 'Take him away.'

'Come on,' said the jailer.

'Oh ah! I'll come on,' replied the Dodger, brushing his hat with the palm of his hand. 'Ah! (to the Bench) it's no use your looking frightened; I won't show you no mercy, not a ha'porth of it. *You'll* pay for this, my fine fellers.

I wouldn’t be you for something! I wouldn’t go free, now, if you was to fall down on your knees and ask me. Here, carry me off to prison! Take me away!’

With these last words, the Dodger suffered himself to be led off by the collar; threatening, till he got into the yard, to make a parliamentary business of it; and then grinning in the officer’s face, with great glee and self-approval.

Having seen him locked up by himself in a little cell, Noah made the best of his way back to where he had left Master Bates. After waiting here some time, he was joined by that young gentleman, who had prudently abstained from showing himself until he had looked carefully abroad from a snug retreat, and ascertained that his new friend had not been followed by any impertinent person.

The two hastened back together, to bear to Mr. Fagin the animating news that the Dodger was doing full justice to his bringing-up, and establishing for himself a glorious reputation.

CHAPTER XLIV

ADEPT AS SHE WAS, in all the arts of cunning and dissimulation, the girl Nancy could not wholly conceal the effect which the knowledge of the step she had taken, wrought upon her mind. She remembered that both the crafty Jew and the brutal Sikes had confided to her schemes, which had been hidden from all others: in the full confidence that she was trustworthy and beyond the reach of their suspicion. Vile as those schemes were, desperate as were their originators, and bitter as were her feelings towards Fagin, who had led her, step by step, deeper and deeper down into an abyss of crime and misery, whence was no escape; still, there were times when, even towards him, she felt some relenting, lest her disclosure should bring him within the iron grasp he had so long eluded, and he should fall at last—richly as he merited such a fate—by her hand.

But, these were the mere wanderings of a mind unable wholly to detach itself from old companions and associations, though enabled to fix itself steadily on one object, and resolved not to be turned aside by any consideration. Her fears for Sikes would have been more powerful inducements to recoil while there was yet time; but she had stipulated that her secret should be rigidly kept, she had dropped no clue which could lead to his discovery, she had refused, even for his sake, a refuge from all the guilt and wretchedness that encompasses her—and what more could she do! She was resolved.

Though all her mental struggles terminated in this conclusion, they forced themselves upon her, again and again, and left their traces too. She grew pale and thin, even within a few days. At times, she took no heed of what was passing before her, or no part in conversations where once, she would have been the loudest. At other times, she laughed without merriment, and was noisy without a moment afterwards—she sat silent and

dejected, brooding with her head upon her hands, while the very effort by which she roused herself, told, more forcibly than even these indications, that she was ill at ease, and that her thoughts were occupied with matters very different and distant from those in the course of discussion by her companions.

It was Sunday night, and the bell of the nearest church struck the hour. Sikes and the Jew were talking, but they paused to listen. The girl looked up from the low seat on which she crouched, and listened too. Eleven.

‘An hour this side of midnight,’ said Sikes, raising the blind to look out and returning to his seat. ‘Dark and heavy it is too. A good night for business this.’

‘Ah!’ replied Fagin. ‘What a pity, Bill, my dear, that there’s none quite ready to be done.’

‘You’re right for once,’ replied Sikes gruffly. ‘It is a pity, for I’m in the humour too.’

Fagin sighed, and shook his head despondingly.

‘We must make up for lost time when we’ve got things into a good train. That’s all I know,’ said Sikes.

‘That’s the way to talk, my dear,’ replied Fagin, venturing to pat him on the shoulder. ‘It does me good to hear you.’

‘Does you good, does it!’ cried Sikes. ‘Well, so be it.’

‘Ha! ha! ha!’ laughed Fagin, as if he were relieved by even this concession. ‘You’re like yourself to-night, Bill. Quite like yourself.’

‘I don’t feel like myself when you lay that withered old claw on my shoulder, so take it away,’ said Sikes, casting off the Jew’s hand.

‘It make you nervous, Bill,—reminds you of being nabbed, does it?’ said Fagin, determined not to be offended.

‘Reminds me of being nabbed by the devil,’ returned Sikes. ‘There never was another man with such a face as yours, unless it was your father, and I suppose *he* is singeing his grizzled red beard by this time, unless you came straight from the old ’un without any father at all betwixt you; which I shouldn’t wonder at, a bit.’

Fagin offered no reply to this compliment: but, pulling Sikes by the sleeve, pointed his finger towards Nancy, who had taken advantage of the foregoing conversation to put on her bonnet, and was now leaving the room.

‘Hallo!’ cried Sikes. ‘Nance. Where’s the gal going to at this time of night?’

‘Not far.’

‘What answer’s that?’ retorted Sikes. ‘Do you hear me?’

‘I don’t know where,’ replied the girl.

‘Then I do,’ said Sikes, more in the spirit of obstinacy than because he had any real objection to the girl going where she listed. ‘Nowhere. Sit down.’

‘I’m not well. I told you that before,’ rejoined the girl. ‘I want a breath of air.’

‘Put your head out of the winder,’ replied Sikes.

‘There’s not enough there,’ said the girl. ‘I want it in the street.’

‘Then you won’t have it,’ replied Sikes. With which assurance he rose, locked the door, took the key out, and pulling her bonnet from her head, flung it up to the top of an old press. ‘There,’ said the robber. ‘Now stop quietly where you are, will you?’

‘It’s not such a matter as a bonnet would keep me,’ said the girl turning very pale. ‘What do you mean, Bill? Do you know what you’re doing?’

‘Know what I’m—Oh!’ cried Sikes, turning to Fagin, ‘she’s out of her senses, you know, or she daren’t talk to me in that way.’

‘You’ll drive me on the something desperate,’ muttered the girl placing both hands upon her breast, as though to keep down by force some violent outbreak. ‘Let me go, will you,—this minute—this instant.’

‘No!’ said Sikes.

‘Tell him to let me go, Fagin. He had better. It’ll be better for him. Do you hear me?’ cried Nancy stamping her foot upon the ground.

‘Hear you!’ repeated Sikes turning round in his chair to confront her. ‘Aye! And if I hear you for half a minute longer, the dog shall have such a grip on your throat as’ll tear some of that screaming voice out. Wot has come over you, you jade! Wot is it?’

‘Let me go,’ said the girl with great earnestness; then sitting herself down on the floor, before the door, she said, ‘Bill, let me go; you don’t know what you are doing. You don’t, indeed. For only one hour—do—do!’

‘Cut my limbs off one by one!’ cried Sikes, seizing her roughly by the arm, ‘If I don’t think the gal’s stark raving mad. Get up.’

‘Not till you let me go—not till you let me go—Never—never!’

screamed the girl. Sikes looked on, for a minute, watching his opportunity, and suddenly pinioning her hands dragged her, struggling and wrestling with him by the way, into a small room adjoining, where he sat himself on a bench, and thrusting her into a chair, held her down by force. She struggled and implored by turns until twelve o'clock had struck, and then, wearied and exhausted, ceased to contest the point any further. With a caution, backed by many oaths, to make no more efforts to go out that night, Sikes left her to recover at leisure and rejoined Fagin.

'Whew!' said the housebreaker wiping the perspiration from his face. 'Wot a precious strange gal that is!'

'You may say that, Bill,' replied Fagin thoughtfully. 'You may say that.'

'Wot did she take it into her head to go out to-night for, do you think?' asked Sikes. 'Come; you should know her better than me. Wot does it mean?'

'Obstinacy; woman's obstinacy, I suppose, my dear.'

'Well, I suppose it is,' growled Sikes. 'I thought I had tamed her, but she's as bad as ever.'

'Worse,' said Fagin thoughtfully. 'I never knew her like this, for such a little cause.'

'Nor I,' said Sikes. 'I think she's got a touch of that fever in her blood yet, and it won't come out—eh?'

'Like enough.'

'I'll let her a little blood, without troubling the doctor, if she's took that way again,' said Sikes.

Fagin nodded an expressive approval of this mode of treatment.

'She was hanging about me all day, and night too, when I was stretched on my back; and you, like a blackhearted wolf as you are, kept yourself aloof,' said Sikes. 'We was poor too, all the time, and I think, one way or other, it's worried and fretted her; and that being shut up here so long has made her restless—eh?'

'That's it, my dear,' replied the Jew in a whisper. 'Hush!'

As he uttered these words, the girl herself appeared and resumed her former seat. Her eyes were swollen and red; she rocked herself to and fro; tossed her head; and, after a little time, burst out laughing.

'Why, now she's on the other tack!' exclaimed Sikes, turning a look of excessive surprise on his companion.

Fagin nodded to him to take no further notice just then; and, in a few minutes, the girl subsided into her accustomed demeanour. Whispering Sikes that there was no fear of her relapsing, Fagin took up his hat and bade him good-night. He paused when he reached the room-door, and looking round, asked if somebody would light him down the dark stairs.

'Light him down,' said Sikes, who was filling his pipe. 'It's a pity he should break his neck himself, and disappoint the sight-seers. Show him a light.'

Nancy followed the old man downstairs, with a candle. When they reached the passage, he laid his finger on his lip, and drawing close to the girl, said, in a whisper.

'What is it, Nancy, dear?'

'What do you mean?' replied the girl, in the same tone.

'The reason of all this,' replied Fagin. 'If *he*'—he pointed with his skinny fore-finger up the stairs—'is so hard with you (he's a brute, Nance, a brute-beast), why don't you—'

'Well?' said the girl, as Fagin paused, with his mouth almost touching her ear, and his eyes looking into hers.

'No matter just now. We'll talk of this again. You have a friend in me, Nance; a staunch friend. I have the means at hand, quiet and close. If you want revenge on those that treat you like a dog—like a dog! worse than his dog, for he humours him sometimes—come to me. I say, come to me. He is the mere hound of a day, but you know me of old, Nance.'

'I know you well,' replied the girl, without manifesting the least emotion. 'Good-night.'

She shrank back, as Fagin offered to lay his hand on hers, but said good-night again, in a steady voice, and, answering his parting look with a nod of intelligence, closed the door between them.

Fagin walked towards his home, intent upon the thoughts that were working within his brain. He had conceived the idea—not from what had just passed though that had tended to confirm him, but slowly and by degrees—that Nancy, wearied of the housebreaker's brutality, had conceived an attachment for some new friend. Her altered manner, her repeated absences from home alone, her comparative indifference to the interests of the gang for which she had once been so zealous, and, added to these, her desperate impatience to leave home that night at a particular hour,

all favoured the supposition, and rendered it, to him at least, almost matter of certainty. The object of this new liking was not among his myrmidons. He would be a valuable acquisition with such an assistant as Nancy, and must (thus Fagin argued) be secured without delay.

There was another, and a darker object, to be gained. Sikes knew too much, and his ruffian taunts had not galled Fagin the less, because the wounds were hidden. The girl must know, well, that if she shook him off, she could never be safe from his fury, and that it would be surely wreaked —to the maiming of limbs, or perhaps the loss of life—on the object of her more recent fancy.

'With a little persuasion,' thought Fagin, 'what more likely than that she would consent to poison him? Women have done such things, and worse, to secure the same object before now. There would be the dangerous villain: the man I hate: gone; another secured in his place; and my influence over the girl, with a knowledge of this crime to back it, unlimited.'

These things passed through the mind of Fagin, during the short time he sat alone, in the housebreaker's room; and with them uppermost in his thoughts, he had taken the opportunity afterwards afforded him, of sounding the girl in the broken hints he threw out at parting. There was no expression of surprise, no assumption of an inability to understand his meaning. The girl clearly comprehended it. Her glance at parting showed *that*.

But perhaps she would recoil from a plot to take the life of Sikes, and that was one of the chief ends to be attained. 'How,' thought Fagin, as he crept homeward, 'can I increase my influence with her? What new power can I acquire?'

Such brains are fertile in expedients. If, without extracting a confession from herself, he laid a watch, discovered the object of her altered regard, and threatened to reveal the whole history to Sikes (of whom she stood in no common fear) unless she entered into his designs, could he not secure her compliance?

'I can,' said Fagin, almost aloud. 'She durst not refuse me then. Not for her life, not for her life! I have it all. The means are ready, and shall be set to work. I shall have you yet!'

He cast back a dark look, and a threatening motion of the hand, towards the spot where he had left the bolder villain; and went on his way: busying his bony hands in the folds of his tattered garment, which he wrenched

tightly in his grasp, as though there were a hated enemy crushed with every motion of his fingers.

CHAPTER XLV

THE OLD MAN WAS up, betimes, next morning, and waited impatiently for the appearance of his new associate, who after a delay that seemed interminable, at length presented himself, and commenced a voracious assault on the breakfast.

‘Bolter,’ said Fagin, drawing up a chair and seating himself opposite Morris Bolter.

‘Well, here I am,’ returned Noah. ‘What’s the matter? Don’t yer ask me to do anything till I have done eating. That’s a great fault in this place. Yer never get time enough over yer meals.’

‘You can talk as you eat, can’t you?’ said Fagin, cursing his dear young friend’s greediness from the very bottom of his heart.

‘Oh yes, I can talk. I get on better when I talk,’ said Noah, cutting a monstrous slice of bread. ‘Where’s Charlotte?’

‘Out,’ said Fagin. ‘I sent her out this morning with the other young woman, because I wanted us to be alone.’

‘Oh!’ said Noah. ‘I wish yer’d ordered her to make some buttered toast first. Well. Talk away. Yer won’t interrupt me.’

There seemed, indeed, no great fear of anything interrupting him, as he had evidently sat down with a determination to do a great deal of business.

‘You did well yesterday, my dear,’ said Fagin. ‘Beautiful! Six shillings and ninepence halfpenny on the very first day! The kinchin lay will be a fortune to you.’

‘Don’t you forget to add three pint-pots and a milk-can,’ said Mr. Bolter.

‘No, no, my dear. The pint-pots were great strokes of genius: but the milk-can was a perfect masterpiece.’

‘Pretty well, I think, for a beginner,’ remarked Mr. Bolter complacently. ‘The pots I took off airy railings, and the milk-can was standing by itself

outside a public-house. I thought it might get rusty with the rain, or catch cold, yer know. Eh? Ha! ha! ha!’

Fagin affected to laugh very heartily; and Mr. Bolter having had his laugh out, took a series of large bites, which finished his first hunk of bread and butter, and assisted himself to a second.

‘I want you, Bolter,’ said Fagin, leaning over the table, ‘to do a piece of work for me, my dear, that needs great care and caution.’

‘I say,’ rejoined Bolter, ‘don’t yer go shoving me into danger, or sending me any more o’ yer police-offices. That don’t suit me, that don’t; and so I tell yer.’

‘That’s not the smallest danger in it—not the very smallest,’ said the Jew; ‘it’s only to dodge a woman.’

‘An old woman?’ demanded Mr. Bolter.

‘A young one,’ replied Fagin.

‘I can do that pretty well, I know,’ said Bolter. ‘I was a regular cunning sneak when I was at school. What am I to dodge her for? Not to—’

‘Not to do anything, but to tell me where she goes, who she sees, and, if possible, what she says; to remember the street, if it is a street, or the house, if it is a house; and to bring me back all the information you can.’

‘What’ll yer give me?’ asked Noah, setting down his cup, and looking his employer, eagerly, in the face.

‘If you do it well, a pound, my dear. One pound,’ said Fagin, wishing to interest him in the scent as much as possible. ‘And that’s what I never gave yet, for any job of work where there wasn’t valuable consideration to be gained.’

‘Who is she?’ inquired Noah.

‘One of us.’

‘Oh Lor!’ cried Noah, curling up his nose. ‘Yer doubtful of her, are yer?’

‘She has found out some new friends, my dear, and I must know who they are,’ replied Fagin.

‘I see,’ said Noah. ‘Just to have the pleasure of knowing them, if they’re respectable people, eh? Ha! ha! ha! I’m your man.’

‘I knew you would be,’ cried Fagin, elated by the success of his proposal.

‘Of course, of course,’ replied Noah. ‘Where is she? Where am I to wait for her? Where am I to go?’

‘All that, my dear, you shall hear from me. I’ll point her out at the proper time,’ said Fagin. ‘You keep ready, and leave the rest to me.’

That night, and the next, and the next again, the spy sat booted and equipped in his carter’s dress: ready to turn out at a word from Fagin. Six nights passed—six long weary nights—and on each, Fagin came home with a disappointed face, and briefly intimated that it was not yet time. On the seventh, he returned earlier, and with an exultation he could not conceal. It was Sunday.

‘She goes abroad to-night,’ said Fagin, ‘and on the right errand, I’m sure; for she has been alone all day, and the man she is afraid of will not be back much before daybreak. Come with me. Quick!’

Noah started up without saying a word; for the Jew was in a state of such intense excitement that it infected him. They left the house stealthily, and hurrying through a labyrinth of streets, arrived at length before a public-house, which Noah recognised as the same in which he had slept, on the night of his arrival in London.

It was past eleven o’clock, and the door was closed. It opened softly on its hinges as Fagin gave a low whistle. They entered, without noise; and the door was closed behind them.

Scarcely venturing to whisper, but substituting dumb show for words, Fagin, and the young Jew who had admitted them, pointed out the pane of glass to Noah, and signed to him to climb up and observe the person in the adjoining room.

‘Is that the woman?’ he asked, scarcely above his breath.

Fagin nodded yes.

‘I can’t see her face well,’ whispered Noah. ‘She is looking down, and the candle is behind her.

‘Stay there,’ whispered Fagin. He signed to Barney, who withdrew. In an instant, the lad entered the room adjoining, and, under pretence of snuffing the candle, moved it in the required position, and, speaking to the girl, caused her to raise her face.

‘I see her now,’ cried the spy.

‘Plainly?’

‘I should know her among a thousand.’

He hastily descended, as the room-door opened, and the girl came out. Fagin drew him behind a small partition which was curtained off, and they

held their breaths as she passed within a few feet of their place of concealment, and emerged by the door at which they had entered.

‘Hist!’ cried the lad who held the door. ‘Dow.’

Noah exchanged a look with Fagin, and darted out.

‘To the left,’ whispered the lad; ‘take the left had, and keep od the other side.’

He did so; and, by the light of the lamps, saw the girl’s retreating figure, already at some distance before him. He advanced as near as he considered prudent, and kept on the opposite side of the street, the better to observe her motions. She looked nervously round, twice or thrice, and once stopped to let two men who were following close behind her, pass on. She seemed to gather courage as she advanced, and to walk with a steadier and firmer step. The spy preserved the same relative distance between them, and followed: with his eye upon her.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE CHURCH CLOCKS CHIMED three quarters past eleven, as two figures emerged on London Bridge. One, which advanced with a swift and rapid step, was that of a woman who looked eagerly about her as though in quest of some expected object; the other figure was that of a man, who slunk along in the deepest shadow he could find, and, at some distance, accommodated his pace to hers: stopping when she stopped: and as she moved again, creeping stealthily on: but never allowing himself, in the ardour of his pursuit, to gain upon her footsteps. Thus, they crossed the bridge, from the Middlesex to the Surrey shore, when the woman, apparently disappointed in her anxious scrutiny of the foot-passengers, turned back. The movement was sudden; but he who watched her, was not thrown off his guard by it; for, shrinking into one of the recesses which surmount the piers of the bridge, and leaning over the parapet the better to conceal his figure, he suffered her to pass on the opposite pavement. When she was about the same distance in advance as she had been before, he slipped quietly down, and followed her again. At nearly the centre of the bridge, she stopped. The man stopped too.

It was a very dark night. The day had been unfavourable, and at that hour and place there were few people stirring. Such as there were, hurried quickly past: very possibly without seeing, but certainly without noticing, either the woman, or the man who kept her in view. Their appearance was not calculated to attract the importunate regards of such of London's destitute population, as chanced to take their way over the bridge that night in search of some cold arch or doorless hovel wherein to lay their heads; they stood there in silence: neither speaking nor spoken to, by any one who passed.

A mist hung over the river, deepening the red glare of the fires that burnt

upon the small craft moored off the different wharfs, and rendering darker and more indistinct the murky buildings on the banks. The old smoke-stained storehouses on either side, rose heavy and dull from the dense mass of roofs and gables, and frowned sternly upon water too black to reflect even their lumbering shapes. The tower of old Saint Saviour's Church, and the spire of Saint Magnus, so long the giant-warders of the ancient bridge, were visible in the gloom; but the forest of shipping below bridge, and the thickly scattered spires of churches above, were nearly all hidden from sight.

The girl had taken a few restless turns to and fro—closely watched meanwhile by her hidden observer—when the heavy bell of St. Paul's tolled for the death of another day. Midnight had come upon the crowded city. The palace, the night-cellar, the jail, the madhouse: the chambers of birth and death, of health and sickness, the rigid face of the corpse and the calm sleep of the child: midnight was upon them all.

The hour had not struck two minutes, when a young lady, accompanied by a grey-haired gentleman, alighted from a hackney-carriage within a short distance of the bridge, and, having dismissed the vehicle, walked straight towards it. They had scarcely set foot upon its pavement, when the girl started, and immediately made towards them.

They walked onward, looking about them with the air of persons who entertained some very slight expectation which had little chance of being realised, when they were suddenly joined by this new associate. They halted with an exclamation of surprise, but suppressed it immediately; for a man in the garments of a countryman came close up—brushed against them, indeed —at that precise moment.

'Not here,' said Nancy hurriedly, 'I am afraid to speak to you here. Come away—out of the public road—down the steps yonder!'

As she uttered these words, and indicated, with her hand, the direction in which she wished them to proceed, the countryman looked round, and roughly asking what they took up the whole pavement for, passed on.

The steps to which the girl had pointed, were those which, on the Surrey bank, and on the same side of the bridge as Saint Saviour's Church, form a landing-stairs from the river. To this spot, the man bearing the appearance of a countryman, hastened unobserved; and after a moment's survey of the place, he began to descend.

These stairs are a part of the bridge; they consist of three flights. Just below the end of the second, going down, the stone wall on the left terminates in an ornamental pilaster facing towards the Thames. At this point the lower steps widen: so that a person turning that angle of the wall, is necessarily unseen by any others on the stairs who chance to be above him, if only a step. The countryman looked hastily round, when he reached this point; and as there seemed no better place of concealment, and, the tide being out, there was plenty of room, he slipped aside, with his back to the pilaster, and there waited: pretty certain that they would come no lower, and that even if he could not hear what was said, he could follow them again, with safety.

So tardily stole the time in this lonely place, and so eager was the spy to penetrate the motives of an interview so different from what he had been led to expect, that he more than once gave the matter up for lost, and persuaded himself, either that they had stopped far above, or had resorted to some entirely different spot to hold their mysterious conversation. He was on the point of emerging from his hiding-place, and regaining the road above, when he heard the sound of footsteps, and directly afterwards of voices almost close at his ear.

He drew himself straight upright against the wall, and, scarcely breathing, listened attentively.

‘This is far enough,’ said a voice, which was evidently that of the gentleman. ‘I will not suffer the young lady to go any farther. Many people would have distrusted you too much to have come even so far, but you see I am willing to humour you.’

‘To humour me!’ cried the voice of the girl whom he had followed. ‘You’re considerate, indeed, sir. To humour me! Well, well, it’s no matter.’

‘Why, for what,’ said the gentleman in a kinder tone, ‘for what purpose can you have brought us to this strange place? Why not have let me speak to you, above there, where it is light, and there is something stirring, instead of bringing us to this dark and dismal hole?’

‘I told you before,’ replied Nancy, ‘that I was afraid to speak to you there. I don’t know why it is,’ said the girl, shuddering, ‘but I have such a fear and dread upon me to-night that I can hardly stand.’

‘A fear of what?’ asked the gentleman, who seemed to pity her.

‘I scarcely know of what,’ replied the girl. ‘I wish I did. Horrible

thoughts of death, and shrouds with blood upon them, and a fear that has made me burn as if I was on fire, have been upon me all day. I was reading a book to-night, to wile the time away, and the same things came into the print.'

'Imagination,' said the gentleman, soothing her.

'No imagination,' replied the girl in a hoarse voice. 'I'll swear I saw "coffin" written in every page of the book in large black letters,—aye, and they carried one close to me, in the streets to-night.'

'There is nothing unusual in that,' said the gentleman. 'They have passed me often.'

'*Real ones*,' rejoined the girl. 'This was not.'

There was something so uncommon in her manner, that the flesh of the concealed listener crept as he heard the girl utter these words, and the blood chilled within him. He had never experienced a greater relief than in hearing the sweet voice of the young lady as she begged her to be calm, and not allow herself to become the prey of such fearful fancies.

'Speak to her kindly,' said the young lady to her companion. 'Poor creature! She seems to need it.'

'Your haughty religious people would have held their heads up to see me as I am to-night, and preached of flames and vengeance,' cried the girl. 'Oh, dear lady, why ar'n't those who claim to be God's own folks as gentle and as kind to us poor wretches as you, who, having youth, and beauty, and all that they have lost, might be a little proud instead of so much humbler?'

'Ah!' said the gentleman. 'A Turk turns his face, after washing it well, to the East, when he says his prayers; these good people, after giving their faces such a rub against the World as to take the smiles off, turn with no less regularity, to the darkest side of Heaven. Between the Mussulman and the Pharisee, commend me to the first!'

These words appeared to be addressed to the young lady, and were perhaps uttered with the view of affording Nancy time to recover herself. The gentleman, shortly afterwards, addressed himself to her.

'You were not here last Sunday night,' he said.

'I couldn't come,' replied Nancy; 'I was kept by force.'

'By whom?'

'Him that I told the young lady of before.'

'You were not suspected of holding any communication with anybody

on the subject which has brought us here to-night, I hope?' asked the old gentleman.

'No,' replied the girl, shaking her head. 'It's not very easy for me to leave him unless he knows why; I couldn't give him a drink of laudanum before I came away.'

'Did he awake before you returned?' inquired the gentleman.

'No; and neither he nor any of them suspect me.'

'Good,' said the gentleman. 'Now listen to me.'

'I am ready,' replied the girl, as he paused for a moment.

'This young lady,' the gentleman began, 'has communicated to me, and to some other friends who can be safely trusted, what you told her nearly a fortnight since. I confess to you that I had doubts, at first, whether you were to be implicitly relied upon, but now I firmly believe you are.'

'I am,' said the girl earnestly.

'I repeat that I firmly believe it. To prove to you that I am disposed to trust you, I tell you without reserve, that we propose to extort the secret, whatever it may be, from the fear of this man Monks. But if—if—' said the gentleman, 'he cannot be secured, or, if secured, cannot be acted upon as we wish, you must deliver up the Jew.'

'Fagin,' cried the girl, recoiling.

'That man must be delivered up by you,' said the gentleman.

'I will not do it! I will never do it!' replied the girl. 'Devil that he is, and worse than devil as he has been to me, I will never do that.'

'You will not?' said the gentleman, who seemed fully prepared for this answer.

'Never!' returned the girl.

'Tell me why?'

'For one reason,' rejoined the girl firmly, 'for one reason, that the lady knows and will stand by me in, I know she will, for I have her promise: and for this other reason, besides, that, bad life as he has led, I have led a bad life too; there are many of us who have kept the same courses together, and I'll not turn upon them, who might—any of them—have turned upon me, but didn't, bad as they are.'

'Then,' said the gentleman, quickly, as if this had been the point he had been aiming to attain; 'put Monks into my hands, and leave him to me to deal with.'

‘What if he turns against the others?’

‘I promise you that in that case, if the truth is forced from him, there the matter will rest; there must be circumstances in Oliver’s little history which it would be painful to drag before the public eye, and if the truth is once elicited, they shall go scot free.’

‘And if it is not?’ suggested the girl.

‘Then,’ pursued the gentleman, ‘this Fagin shall not be brought to justice without your consent. In such a case I could show you reasons, I think, which would induce you to yield it.’

‘Have I the lady’s promise for that?’ asked the girl.

‘You have,’ replied Rose. ‘My true and faithful pledge.’

‘Monks would never learn how you knew what you do?’ said the girl, after a short pause.

‘Never,’ replied the gentleman. ‘The intelligence should be brought to bear upon him, that he could never even guess.’

‘I have been a liar, and among liars from a little child,’ said the girl after another interval of silence, ‘but I will take your words.’

After receiving an assurance from both, that she might safely do so, she proceeded in a voice so low that it was often difficult for the listener to discover even the purport of what she said, to describe, by name and situation, the public-house whence she had been followed that night. From the manner in which she occasionally paused, it appeared as if the gentleman were making some hasty notes of the information she communicated. When she had thoroughly explained the localities of the place, the best position from which to watch it without exciting observation, and the night and hour on which Monks was most in the habit of frequenting it, she seemed to consider for a few moments, for the purpose of recalling his features and appearances more forcibly to her recollection.

‘He is tall,’ said the girl, ‘and a strongly made man, but not stout; he has a lurking walk; and as he walks, constantly looks over his shoulder, first on one side, and then on the other. Don’t forget that, for his eyes are sunk in his head so much deeper than any other man’s, that you might almost tell him by that alone. His face is dark, like his hair and eyes; and, although he can’t be more than six or eight and twenty, withered and haggard. His lips are often discoloured and disfigured with the marks of teeth; for he has desperate fits, and sometimes even bites his hands and covers them with

wounds—why did you start?’ said the girl, stopping suddenly.

The gentleman replied, in a hurried manner, that he was not conscious of having done so, and begged her to proceed.

‘Part of this,’ said the girl, ‘I have drawn out from other people at the house I tell you of, for I have only seen him twice, and both times he was covered up in a large cloak. I think that’s all I can give you to know him by. Stay though,’ she added. ‘Upon his throat: so high that you can see a part of it below his neckerchief when he turns his face: there is—’

‘A broad red mark, like a burn or scald?’ cried the gentleman.

‘How’s this?’ said the girl. ‘You know him!’

The young lady uttered a cry of surprise, and for a few moments they were so still that the listener could distinctly hear them breathe.

‘I think I do,’ said the gentleman, breaking silence. ‘I should by your description. We shall see. Many people are singularly like each other. It may not be the same.’

As he expressed himself to this effect, with assumed carelessness, he took a step or two nearer the concealed spy, as the latter could tell from the distinctness with which he heard him mutter, ‘It must be he!’

‘Now,’ he said, returning: so it seemed by the sound: to the spot where he had stood before, ‘you have given us most valuable assistance, young woman, and I wish you to be the better for it. What can I do to serve you?’

‘Nothing,’ replied Nancy.

‘You will not persist in saying that,’ rejoined the gentleman, with a voice and emphasis of kindness that might have touched a much harder and more obdurate heart. ‘Think now. Tell me.’

‘Nothing, sir,’ rejoined the girl, weeping. ‘You can do nothing to help me. I am past all hope, indeed.’

‘You put yourself beyond its pale,’ said the gentleman. ‘The past has been a dreary waste with you, of youthful energies mis-spent, and such priceless treasures lavished, as the Creator bestows but once and never grants again, but, for the future, you may hope. I do not say that it is in our power to offer you peace of heart and mind, for that must come as you seek it; but a quiet asylum, either in England, or, if you fear to remain here, in some foreign country, it is not only within the compass of our ability but our most anxious wish to secure you. Before the dawn of morning, before this river wakes to the first glimpse of day-light, you shall be placed as

entirely beyond the reach of your former associates, and leave as utter an absence of all trace behind you, as if you were to disappear from the earth this moment. Come! I would not have you go back to exchange one word with any old companion, or take one look at any old haunt, or breathe the very air which is pestilence and death to you. Quit them all, while there is time and opportunity!'

'She will be persuaded now,' cried the young lady. 'She hesitates, I am sure.'

'I fear not, my dear,' said the gentleman.

'No sir, I do not,' replied the girl, after a short struggle. 'I am chained to my old life. I loathe and hate it now, but I cannot leave it. I must have gone too far to turn back,—and yet I don't know, for if you had spoken to me so, some time ago, I should have laughed it off. But,' she said, looking hastily round, 'this fear comes over me again. I must go home.'

'Home!' repeated the young lady, with great stress upon the word.

'Home, lady,' rejoined the girl. 'To such a home as I have raised for myself with the work of my whole life. Let us part. I shall be watched or seen. Go! Go! If I have done you any service all I ask is, that you leave me, and let me go my way alone.'

'It is useless,' said the gentleman, with a sigh. 'We compromise her safety, perhaps, by staying here. We may have detained her longer than she expected already.'

'Yes, yes,' urged the girl. 'You have.'

'What,' cried the young lady, 'can be the end of this poor creature's life!'

'What!' repeated the girl. 'Look before you, lady. Look at that dark water. How many times do you read of such as I who spring into the tide, and leave no living thing, to care for, or bewail them. It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I shall come to that at last.'

'Do not speak thus, pray,' returned the young lady, sobbing.

'It will never reach your ears, dear lady, and God forbid such horrors should!' replied the girl. 'Good-night, good-night!'

The gentleman turned away.

'This purse,' cried the young lady. 'Take it for my sake, that you may have some resource in an hour of need and trouble.'

'No!' replied the girl. 'I have not done this for money. Let me have that to think of. And yet—give me something that you have worn: I should like

to have something—no, no, not a ring—your gloves or handkerchief—anything that I can keep, as having belonged to you, sweet lady. There. Bless you! God bless you. Good-night, good-night!'

The violent agitation of the girl, and the apprehension of some discovery which would subject her to ill-usage and violence, seemed to determine the gentleman to leave her, as she requested.

The sound of retreating footsteps were audible and the voices ceased.

The two figures of the young lady and her companion soon afterwards appeared upon the bridge. They stopped at the summit of the stairs.

'Hark!' cried the young lady, listening. 'Did she call! I thought I heard her voice.'

'No, my love,' replied Mr. Brownlow, looking sadly back. 'She has not moved, and will not till we are gone.'

Rose Maylie lingered, but the old gentleman drew her arm through his, and led her, with gentle force, away. As they disappeared, the girl sunk down nearly at her full length upon one of the stone stairs, and vented the anguish of her heart in bitter tears.

After a time she arose, and with feeble and tottering steps ascended the street. The astonished listener remained motionless on his post for some minutes afterwards, and having ascertained, with many cautious glances round him, that he was again alone, crept slowly from his hiding-place, and returned, stealthily and in the shade of the wall, in the same manner as he had descended.

Peeping out, more than once, when he reached the top, to make sure that he was unobserved, Noah Claypole darted away at his utmost speed, and made for the Jew's house as fast as his legs would carry him.

CHAPTER XLVII

IT WAS NEARLY TWO hours before day-break; that time which in the autumn of the year, may be truly called the dead of night; when the streets are silent and deserted; when even sounds appear to slumber, and profligacy and riot have staggered home to dream; it was at this still and silent hour, that Fagin sat watching in his old lair, with face so distorted and pale, and eyes so red and blood-shot, that he looked less like a man, than like some hideous phantom, moist from the grave, and worried by an evil spirit.

He sat crouching over a cold hearth, wrapped in an old torn coverlet, with his face turned towards a wasting candle that stood upon a table by his side. His right hand was raised to his lips, and as, absorbed in thought, he hit his long black nails, he disclosed among his toothless gums a few such fangs as should have been a dog's or rat's.

Stretched upon a mattress on the floor, lay Noah Claypole, fast asleep. Towards him the old man sometimes directed his eyes for an instant, and then brought them back again to the candle; which with a long-burnt wick drooping almost double, and hot grease falling down in clots upon the table, plainly showed that his thoughts were busy elsewhere.

Indeed they were. Mortification at the overthrow of his notable scheme; hatred of the girl who had dared to palter with strangers; and utter distrust of the sincerity of her refusal to yield him up; bitter disappointment at the loss of his revenge on Sikes; the fear of detection, and ruin, and death; and a fierce and deadly rage kindled by all; these were the passionate considerations which, following close upon each other with rapid and ceaseless whirl, shot through the brain of Fagin, as every evil thought and blackest purpose lay working at his heart.

He sat without changing his attitude in the least, or appearing to take the smallest heed of time, until his quick ear seemed to be attracted by a

footstep in the street.

‘At last,’ he muttered, wiping his dry and fevered mouth. ‘At last!’

The bell rang gently as he spoke. He crept upstairs to the door, and presently returned accompanied by a man muffled to the chin, who carried a bundle under one arm. Sitting down and throwing back his outer coat, the man displayed the burly frame of Sikes.

‘There!’ he said, laying the bundle on the table. ‘Take care of that, and do the most you can with it. It’s been trouble enough to get; I thought I should have been here, three hours ago.’

Fagin laid his hand upon the bundle, and locking it in the cupboard, sat down again without speaking. But he did not take his eyes off the robber, for an instant, during this action; and now that they sat over against each other, face to face, he looked fixedly at him, with his lips quivering so violently, and his face so altered by the emotions which had mastered him, that the housebreaker involuntarily drew back his chair, and surveyed him with a look of real affright.

‘Wot now?’ cried Sikes. ‘Wot do you look at a man so for?’

Fagin raised his right hand, and shook his trembling forefinger in the air; but his passion was so great, that the power of speech was for the moment gone.

‘Damme!’ said Sikes, feeling in his breast with a look of alarm. ‘He’s gone mad. I must look to myself here.’

‘No, no,’ rejoined Fagin, finding his voice. ‘It’s not—you’re not the person, Bill. I’ve no—no fault to find with you.’

‘Oh, you haven’t, haven’t you?’ said Sikes, looking sternly at him, and ostentatiously passing a pistol into a more convenient pocket. ‘That’s lucky—for one of us. Which one that is, don’t matter.’

‘I’ve got that to tell you, Bill,’ said Fagin, drawing his chair nearer, ‘will make you worse than me.’

‘Aye?’ returned the robber with an incredulous air. ‘Tell away! Look sharp, or Nance will think I’m lost.’

‘Lost!’ cried Fagin. ‘She has pretty well settled that, in her own mind, already.’

Sikes looked with an aspect of great perplexity into the Jew’s face, and reading no satisfactory explanation of the riddle there, clenched his coat collar in his huge hand and shook him soundly.

‘Speak, will you!’ he said; ‘or if you don’t, it shall be for want of breath. Open your mouth and say wot you’ve got to say in plain words. Out with it, you thundering old cur, out with it!’

‘Suppose that lad that’s laying there—’ Fagin began.

Sikes turned round to where Noah was sleeping, as if he had not previously observed him. ‘Well!’ he said, resuming his former position.

‘Suppose that lad,’ pursued Fagin, ‘was to peach—to blow upon us all—first seeking out the right folks for the purpose, and then having a meeting with ’em in the street to paint our likenesses, describe every mark that they might know us by, and the crib where we might be most easily taken. Suppose he was to do all this, and besides to blow upon a plant we’ve all been in, more or less—of his own fancy; not grabbed, trapped, tried, earwigged by the parson and brought to it on bread and water,—but of his own fancy; to please his own taste; stealing out at nights to find those most interested against us, and peaching to them. Do you hear me?’ cried the Jew, his eyes flashing with rage. ‘Suppose he did all this, what then?’

‘What then!’ replied Sikes; with a tremendous oath. ‘If he was left alive till I came, I’d grind his skull under the iron heel of my boot into as many grains as there are hairs upon his head.’

‘What if I did it!’ cried Fagin almost in a yell. ‘I, that knows so much, and could hang so many besides myself!’

‘I don’t know,’ replied Sikes, clenching his teeth and turning white at the mere suggestion. ‘I’d do something in the jail that ’ud get me put in irons; and if I was tried along with you, I’d fall upon you with them in the open court, and beat your brains out afore the people. I should have such strength,’ muttered the robber, poising his brawny arm, ‘that I could smash your head as if a loaded waggon had gone over it.’

‘You would?’

‘Would I!’ said the housebreaker. ‘Try me.’

‘If it was Charley, or the Dodger, or Bet, or—’

‘I don’t care who,’ replied Sikes impatiently. ‘Whoever it was, I’d serve them the same.’

Fagin looked hard at the robber; and, motioning him to be silent, stooped over the bed upon the floor, and shook the sleeper to rouse him. Sikes leant forward in his chair: looking on with his hands upon his knees, as if wondering much what all this questioning and preparation was to end in.

‘Bolter, Bolter! Poor lad!’ said Fagin, looking up with an expression of devilish anticipation, and speaking slowly and with marked emphasis. ‘He’s tired—tired with watching for her so long,—watching for *her*, Bill.’

‘Wot d’ye mean?’ asked Sikes, drawing back.

Fagin made no answer, but bending over the sleeper again, hauled him into a sitting posture. When his assumed name had been repeated several times, Noah rubbed his eyes, and, giving a heavy yawn, looked sleepily about him.

‘Tell me that again—once again, just for him to hear,’ said the Jew, pointing to Sikes as he spoke.

‘Tell yer what?’ asked the sleepy Noah, shaking himself pettishly.

‘That about— *Nancy*,’ said Fagin, clutching Sikes by the wrist, as if to prevent his leaving the house before he had heard enough. ‘You followed her?’

‘Yes.’

‘To London Bridge?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where she met two people.’

‘So she did.’

‘A gentleman and a lady that she had gone to of her own accord before, who asked her to give up all her pals, and Monks first, which she did—and to describe him, which she did—and to tell her what house it was that we meet at, and go to, which she did—and where it could be best watched from, which she did—and what time the people went there, which she did. She did all this. She told it all every word without a threat, without a murmur—she did—did she not?’ cried Fagin, half mad with fury.

‘All right,’ replied Noah, scratching his head. ‘That’s just what it was!’

‘What did they say, about last Sunday?’

‘About last Sunday!’ replied Noah, considering. ‘Why I told yer that before.’

‘Again. Tell it again!’ cried Fagin, tightening his grasp on Sikes, and brandishing his other hand aloft, as the foam flew from his lips.

‘They asked her,’ said Noah, who, as he grew more wakeful, seemed to have a dawning perception who Sikes was, ‘they asked her why she didn’t come, last Sunday, as she promised. She said she couldn’t.’

‘Why—why? Tell him that.’

‘Because she was forcibly kept at home by Bill, the man she had told them of before,’ replied Noah.

‘What more of him?’ cried Fagin. ‘What more of the man she had told them of before? Tell him that, tell him that.’

‘Why, that she couldn’t very easily get out of doors unless he knew where she was going to,’ said Noah; ‘and so the first time she went to see the lady, she—ha! ha! ha! it made me laugh when she said it, that it did—she gave him a drink of laudanum.’

‘Hell’s fire!’ cried Sikes, breaking fiercely from the Jew. ‘Let me go!’

Flinging the old man from him, he rushed from the room, and darted, wildly and furiously, up the stairs.

‘Bill, Bill!’ cried Fagin, following him hastily. ‘A word. Only a word.’

The word would not have been exchanged, but that the housebreaker was unable to open the door: on which he was expending fruitless oaths and violence, when the Jew came panting up.

‘Let me out,’ said Sikes. ‘Don’t speak to me; it’s not safe. Let me out, I say!’

‘Hear me speak a word,’ rejoined Fagin, laying his hand upon the lock. ‘You won’t be—’

‘Well,’ replied the other.

‘You won’t be—too—violent, Bill?’

The day was breaking, and there was light enough for the men to see each other’s faces. They exchanged one brief glance; there was a fire in the eyes of both, which could not be mistaken.

‘I mean,’ said Fagin, showing that he felt all disguise was now useless, ‘not too violent for safety. Be crafty, Bill, and not too bold.’

Sikes made no reply; but, pulling open the door, of which Fagin had turned the lock, dashed into the silent streets.

Without one pause, or moment’s consideration; without once turning his head to the right or left, or raising his eyes to the sky, or lowering them to the ground, but looking straight before him with savage resolution: his teeth so tightly compressed that the strained jaw seemed starting through his skin; the robber held on his headlong course, nor muttered a word, nor relaxed a muscle, until he reached his own door. He opened it, softly, with a key; strode lightly up the stairs; and entering his own room, double-locked the door, and lifting a heavy table against it, drew back the curtain of the bed.

The girl was lying, half-dressed, upon it. He had roused her from her sleep, for she raised herself with a hurried and startled look.

‘Get up!’ said the man.

‘It is you, Bill!’ said the girl, with an expression of pleasure at his return.

‘It is,’ was the reply. ‘Get up.’

There was a candle burning, but the man hastily drew it from the candlestick, and hurled it under the grate. Seeing the faint light of early day without, the girl rose to undraw the curtain.

‘Let it be,’ said Sikes, thrusting his hand before her. ‘There’s enough light for wot I’ve got to do.’

‘Bill,’ said the girl, in the low voice of alarm, ‘why do you look like that at me!’

The robber sat regarding her, for a few seconds, with dilated nostrils and heaving breast; and then, grasping her by the head and throat, dragged her into the middle of the room, and looking once towards the door, placed his heavy hand upon her mouth.

‘Bill, Bill!’ gasped the girl, wrestling with the strength of mortal fear, —‘I—I won’t scream or cry—not once—hear me—speak to me—tell me what I have done!’

‘You know, you she devil!’ returned the robber, suppressing his breath. ‘You were watched to-night; every word you said was heard.’

‘Then spare my life for the love of Heaven, as I spared yours,’ rejoined the girl, clinging to him. ‘Bill, dear Bill, you cannot have the heart to kill me. Oh! think of all I have given up, only this one night, for you. You *shall* have time to think, and save yourself this crime; I will not loose my hold, you cannot throw me off. Bill, Bill, for dear God’s sake, for your own, for mine, stop before you spill my blood! I have been true to you, upon my guilty soul I have!’

The man struggled violently, to release his arms; but those of the girl were clasped round his, and tear her as he would, he could not tear them away.

‘Bill,’ cried the girl, striving to lay her head upon his breast, ‘the gentleman and that dear lady, told me to-night of a home in some foreign country where I could end my days in solitude and peace. Let me see them again, and beg them, on my knees, to show the same mercy and goodness to you; and let us both leave this dreadful place, and far apart lead better lives,

and forget how we have lived, except in prayers, and never see each other more. It is never too late to repent. They told me so—I feel it now—but we must have time—a little, little time!’

The housebreaker freed one arm, and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired, flashed across his mind even in the midst of his fury; and he beat it twice with all the force he could summon, upon the upturned face that almost touched his own.

She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; but raising herself, with difficulty, on her knees, drew from her bosom a white handkerchief—Rose Maylie’s own—and holding it up, in her folded hands, as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would allow, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker.

It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down.

CHAPTER XLVIII

OF ALL BAD DEEDS that, under cover of the darkness, had been committed within wide London's bounds since night hung over it, that was the worst. Of all the horrors that rose with an ill scent upon the morning air, that was the foulest and most cruel.

The sun—the bright sun, that brings back, not light alone, but new life, and hope, and freshness to man—burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory. Through costly-coloured glass and paper-mended window, through cathedral dome and rotten crevice, it shed its equal ray. It lighted up the room where the murdered woman lay. It did. He tried to shut it out, but it would stream in. If the sight had been a ghastly one in the dull morning, what was it, now, in all that brilliant light!

He had not moved; he had been afraid to stir. There had been a moan and motion of the hand; and, with terror added to rage, he had struck and struck again. Once he threw a rug over it; but it was worse to fancy the eyes, and imagine them moving towards him, than to see them glaring upward, as if watching the reflection of the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the ceiling. He had plucked it off again. And there was the body —mere flesh and blood, no more—but such flesh, and so much blood!

He struck a light, kindled a fire, and thrust the club into it. There was hair upon the end, which blazed and shrunk into a light cinder, and, caught by the air, whirled up the chimney. Even that frightened him, sturdy as he was; but he held the weapon till it broke, and then piled it on the coals to burn away, and smoulder into ashes. He washed himself, and rubbed his clothes; there were spots that would not be removed, but he cut the pieces out, and burnt them. How those stains were dispersed about the room! The very feet of the dog were bloody.

All this time he had, never once, turned his back upon the corpse; no, not

for a moment. Such preparations completed, he moved, backward, towards the door: dragging the dog with him, lest he should soil his feet anew and carry out new evidence of the crime into the streets. He shut the door softly, locked it, took the key, and left the house.

He crossed over, and glanced up at the window, to be sure that nothing was visible from the outside. There was the curtain still drawn, which she would have opened to admit the light she never saw again. It lay nearly under there. *He* knew that. God, how the sun poured down upon the very spot!

The glance was instantaneous. It was a relief to have got free of the room. He whistled on the dog, and walked rapidly away.

He went through Islington; strode up the hill at Highgate on which stands the stone in honour of Whittington; turned down to Highgate Hill, unsteady of purpose, and uncertain where to go; struck off to the right again, almost as soon as he began to descend it; and taking the foot-path across the fields, skirted Caen Wood, and so came on Hampstead Heath. Traversing the hollow by the Vale of Heath, he mounted the opposite bank, and crossing the road which joins the villages of Hampstead and Highgate, made along the remaining portion of the heath to the fields at North End, in one of which he laid himself down under a hedge, and slept.

Soon he was up again, and away,—not far into the country, but back towards London by the high-road—then back again—then over another part of the same ground as he already traversed—then wandering up and down in fields, and lying on ditches' brinks to rest, and starting up to make for some other spot, and do the same, and ramble on again.

Where could he go, that was near and not too public, to get some meat and drink? Hendon. That was a good place, not far off, and out of most people's way. Thither he directed his steps,—running sometimes, and sometimes, with a strange perversity, loitering at a snail's pace, or stopping altogether and idly breaking the hedges with a stick. But when he got there, all the people he met—the very children at the doors—seemed to view him with suspicion. Back he turned again, without the courage to purchase bit or drop, though he had tasted no food for many hours; and once more he lingered on the Heath, uncertain where to go.

He wandered over miles and miles of ground, and still came back to the old place. Morning and noon had passed, and the day was on the wane, and

still he rambled to and fro, and up and down, and round and round, and still lingered about the same spot. At last he got away, and shaped his course for Hatfield.

It was nine o’clock at night, when the man, quite tired out, and the dog, limping and lame from the unaccustomed exercise, turned down the hill by the church of the quiet village, and plodding along the little street, crept into a small public-house, whose scanty light had guided them to the spot. There was a fire in the tap-room, and some country-labourers were drinking before it.

They made room for the stranger, but he sat down in the furthest corner, and ate and drank alone, or rather with his dog: to whom he cast a morsel of food from time to time.

The conversation of the men assembled here, turned upon the neighbouring land, and farmers; and when those topics were exhausted, upon the age of some old man who had been buried on the previous Sunday; the young men present considering him very old, and the old men present declaring him to have been quite young—not older, one white-haired grandfather said, than he was—with ten or fifteen year of life in him at least—if he had taken care; if he had taken care.

There was nothing to attract attention, or excite alarm in this. The robber, after paying his reckoning, sat silent and unnoticed in his corner, and had almost dropped asleep, when he was half wakened by the noisy entrance of a new comer.

This was an antic fellow, half pedlar and half mountebank, who travelled about the country on foot to vend hones, strops, razors, washballs, harness-paste, medicine for dogs and horses, cheap perfumery, cosmetics, and such-like wares, which he carried in a case slung to his back. His entrance was the signal for various homely jokes with the countrymen, which slackened not until he had made his supper, and opened his box of treasures, when he ingeniously contrived to unite business with amusement.

‘And what be that stoof? Good to eat, Harry?’ asked a grinning countryman, pointing to some composition-cakes in one corner.

‘This,’ said the fellow, producing one, ‘this is the infallible and invaluable composition for removing all sorts of stain, rust, dirt, mildew, spick, speck, spot, or spatter, from silk, satin, linen, cambric, cloth, crape, stuff, carpet, merino, muslin, bombazeen, or woollen stuff. Wine-stains,

fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, any stains, all come out at one rub with the infallible and invaluable composition. If a lady stains her honour, she has only need to swallow one cake and she's cured at once—for it's poison. If a gentleman wants to prove this, he has only need to bolt one little square, and he has put it beyond question—for it's quite as satisfactory as a pistol-bullet, and a great deal nastier in the flavour, consequently the more credit in taking it. One penny a square. With all these virtues, one penny a square!'

There were two buyers directly, and more of the listeners plainly hesitated. The vendor observing this, increased in loquacity.

'It's all bought up as fast as it can be made,' said the fellow. 'There are fourteen water-mills, six steam-engines, and a galvanic battery, always a-working upon it, and they can't make it fast enough, though the men work so hard that they die off, and the widows is pensioned directly, with twenty pound a-year for each of the children, and a premium of fifty for twins. One penny a square! Two half-pence is all the same, and four farthings is received with joy. One penny a square! Wine-stains, fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, mud-stains, blood-stains! Here is a stain upon the hat of a gentleman in company, that I'll take clean out, before he can order me a pint of ale.'

'Hah!' cried Sikes starting up. 'Give that back.'

'I'll take it clean out, sir,' replied the man, winking to the company, 'before you can come across the room to get it. Gentlemen all, observe the dark stain upon this gentleman's hat, no wider than a shilling, but thicker than a half-crown. Whether it is a wine-stain, fruit-stain, beer-stain, water-stain, paint-stain, pitch-stain, mud-stain, or blood-stain—'

The man got no further, for Sikes with a hideous imprecation overthrew the table, and tearing the hat from him, burst out of the house.

With the same perversity of feeling and irresolution that had fastened upon him, despite himself, all day, the murderer, finding that he was not followed, and that they most probably considered him some drunken sullen fellow, turned back up the town, and getting out of the glare of the lamps of a stage-coach that was standing in the street, was walking past, when he recognised the mail from London, and saw that it was standing at the little post-office. He almost knew what was to come; but he crossed over, and listened.

The guard was standing at the door, waiting for the letter-bag. A man, dressed like a game-keeper, came up at the moment, and he handed him a basket which lay ready on the pavement.

‘That’s for your people,’ said the guard. ‘Now, look alive in there, will you. Damn that ’ere bag, it warn’t ready night afore last; this won’t do, you know!’

‘Anything new up in town, Ben?’ asked the game-keeper, drawing back to the window-shutters, the better to admire the horses.

‘No, nothing that I knows on,’ replied the man, pulling on his gloves. ‘Corn’s up a little. I heerd talk of a murder, too, down Spitalfields way, but I don’t reckon much upon it.’

‘Oh, that’s quite true,’ said a gentleman inside, who was looking out of the window. ‘And a dreadful murder it was.’

‘Was it, sir?’ rejoined the guard, touching his hat. ‘Man or woman, pray, sir?’

‘A woman,’ replied the gentleman. ‘It is supposed—’

‘Now, Ben,’ replied the coachman impatiently.

‘Damn that ’ere bag,’ said the guard; ‘are you gone to sleep in there?’

‘Coming!’ cried the office keeper, running out.

‘Coming,’ growled the guard. ‘Ah, and so’s the young ’ooman of property that’s going to take a fancy to me, but I don’t know when. Here, give hold. All ri—ight!’

The horn sounded a few cheerful notes, and the coach was gone.

Sikes remained standing in the street, apparently unmoved by what he had just heard, and agitated by no stronger feeling than a doubt where to go. At length he went back again, and took the road which leads from Hatfield to St. Albans.

He went on doggedly; but as he left the town behind him, and plunged into the solitude and darkness of the road, he felt a dread and awe creeping upon him which shook him to the core. Every object before him, substance or shadow, still or moving, took the semblance of some fearful thing; but these fears were nothing compared to the sense that haunted him of that morning’s ghastly figure following at his heels. He could trace its shadow in the gloom, supply the smallest item of the outline, and note how stiff and solemn it seemed to stalk along. He could hear its garments rustling in the leaves, and every breath of wind came laden with that last low cry. If he

stopped it did the same. If he ran, it followed—not running too: that would have been a relief: but like a corpse endowed with the mere machinery of life, and borne on one slow melancholy wind that never rose or fell.

At times, he turned, with desperate determination, resolved to beat this phantom off, though it should look him dead; but the hair rose on his head, and his blood stood still, for it had turned with him and was behind him then. He had kept it before him that morning, but it was behind now—always. He leaned his back against a bank, and felt that it stood above him, visibly out against the cold night-sky. He threw himself upon the road—on his back upon the road. At his head it stood, silent, erect, and still—a living grave-stone, with its epitaph in blood.

Let no man talk of murderers escaping justice, and hint that Providence must sleep. There were twenty score of violent deaths in one long minute of that agony of fear.

There was a shed in a field he passed, that offered shelter for the night. Before the door, were three tall poplar trees, which made it very dark within; and the wind moaned through them with a dismal wail. He *could not* walk on, till daylight came again; and here he stretched himself close to the wall—to undergo new torture.

For now, a vision came before him, as constant and more terrible than that from which he had escaped. Those widely staring eyes, so lustreless and so glassy, that he had better borne to see them than think upon them, appeared in the midst of the darkness: light in themselves, but giving light to nothing. There were but two, but they were everywhere. If he shut out the sight, there came the room with every well-known object—some, indeed, that he would have forgotten, if he had gone over its contents from memory—each in its accustomed place. The body was in *its* place, and its eyes were as he saw them when he stole away. He got up, and rushed into the field without. The figure was behind him. He re-entered the shed, and shrunk down once more. The eyes were there, before he had laid himself along.

And here he remained in such terror as none but he can know, trembling in every limb, and the cold sweat starting from every pore, when suddenly there arose upon the night-wind the noise of distant shouting, and the roar of voices mingled in alarm and wonder. Any sound of men in that lonely place, even though it conveyed a real cause of alarm, was something to him. He regained his strength and energy at the prospect of personal danger; and

springing to his feet, rushed into the open air.

The broad sky seemed on fire. Rising into the air with showers of sparks, and rolling one above the other, were sheets of flame, lighting the atmosphere for miles round, and driving clouds of smoke in the direction where he stood. The shouts grew louder as new voices swelled the roar, and he could hear the cry of Fire! mingled with the ringing of an alarm-bell, the fall of heavy bodies, and the crackling of flames as they twined round some new obstacle, and shot aloft as though refreshed by food. The noise increased as he looked. There were people there—men and women—light, bustle. It was like new life to him. He darted onward—straight, headlong—dashing through brier and brake, and leaping gate and fence as madly as his dog, who careered with loud and sounding bark before him.

He came upon the spot. There were half-dressed figures tearing to and fro, some endeavouring to drag the frightened horses from the stables, others driving the cattle from the yard and out-houses, and others coming laden from the burning pile, amidst a shower of falling sparks, and the tumbling down of red-hot beams. The apertures, where doors and windows stood an hour ago, disclosed a mass of raging fire; walls rocked and crumbled into the burning well; the molten lead and iron poured down, white hot, upon the ground. Women and children shrieked, and men encouraged each other with noisy shouts and cheers. The clanking of the engine-pumps, and the spirting and hissing of the water as it fell upon the blazing wood, added to the tremendous roar. He shouted, too, till he was hoarse; and flying from memory and himself, plunged into the thickest of the throng. Hither and thither he dived that night: now working at the pumps, and now hurrying through the smoke and flame, but never ceasing to engage himself wherever noise and men were thickest. Up and down the ladders, upon the roofs of buildings, over floors that quaked and trembled with his weight, under the lee of falling bricks and stones, in every part of that great fire was he; but he bore a charmed life, and had neither scratch nor bruise, nor weariness nor thought, till morning dawned again, and only smoke and blackened ruins remained.

This mad excitement over, there returned, with ten-fold force, the dreadful consciousness of his crime. He looked suspiciously about him, for the men were conversing in groups, and he feared to be the subject of their talk. The dog obeyed the significant beck of his finger, and they drew off,

stealthily, together. He passed near an engine where some men were seated, and they called to him to share in their refreshment. He took some bread and meat; and as he drank a draught of beer, heard the firemen, who were from London, talking about the murder. ‘He has gone to Birmingham, they say,’ said one: ‘but they’ll have him yet, for the scouts are out, and by to-morrow night there’ll be a cry all through the country.’

He hurried off, and walked till he almost dropped upon the ground; then lay down in a lane, and had a long, but broken and uneasy sleep. He wandered on again, irresolute and undecided, and oppressed with the fear of another solitary night.

Suddenly, he took the desperate resolution to going back to London.

‘There’s somebody to speak to there, at all event,’ he thought. ‘A good hiding-place, too. They’ll never expect to nab me there, after this country scent. Why can’t I lie by for a week or so, and, forcing blunt from Fagin, get abroad to France? Damme, I’ll risk it.’

He acted upon this impulse without delay, and choosing the least frequented roads began his journey back, resolved to lie concealed within a short distance of the metropolis, and, entering it at dusk by a circuitous route, to proceed straight to that part of it which he had fixed on for his destination.

The dog, though. If any description of him were out, it would not be forgotten that the dog was missing, and had probably gone with him. This might lead to his apprehension as he passed along the streets. He resolved to drown him, and walked on, looking about for a pond: picking up a heavy stone and tying it to his handkerchief as he went.

The animal looked up into his master’s face while these preparations were making; whether his instinct apprehended something of their purpose, or the robber’s sidelong look at him was sterner than ordinary, he skulked a little farther in the rear than usual, and cowered as he came more slowly along. When his master halted at the brink of a pool, and looked round to call him, he stopped outright.

‘Do you hear me call? Come here!’ cried Sikes.

The animal came up from the very force of habit; but as Sikes stooped to attach the handkerchief to his throat, he uttered a low growl and started back.

‘Come back!’ said the robber.

The dog wagged his tail, but moved not. Sikes made a running noose and called him again.

The dog advanced, retreated, paused an instant, and scoured away at his hardest speed.

The man whistled again and again, and sat down and waited in the expectation that he would return. But no dog appeared, and at length he resumed his journey.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE TWILIGHT WAS BEGINNING to close in, when Mr. Brownlow alighted from a hackney-coach at his own door, and knocked softly. The door being opened, a sturdy man got out of the coach and stationed himself on one side of the steps, while another man, who had been seated on the box, dismounted too, and stood upon the other side. At a sign from Mr. Brownlow, they helped out a third man, and taking him between them, hurried him into the house. This man was Monks.

They walked in the same manner up the stairs without speaking, and Mr. Brownlow, preceding them, led the way into a back-room. At the door of this apartment, Monks, who had ascended with evident reluctance, stopped. The two men looked at the old gentleman as if for instructions.

‘He knows the alternative,’ said Mr. Browlow. ‘If he hesitates or moves a finger but as you bid him, drag him into the street, call for the aid of the police, and impeach him as a felon in my name.’

‘How dare you say this of me?’ asked Monks.

‘How dare you urge me to it, young man?’ replied Mr. Brownlow, confronting him with a steady look. ‘Are you mad enough to leave this house? Unhand him. There, sir. You are free to go, and we to follow. But I warn you, by all I hold most solemn and most sacred, that instant will have you apprehended on a charge of fraud and robbery. I am resolute and immoveable. If you are determined to be the same, your blood be upon your own head!’

‘By what authority am I kidnapped in the street, and brought here by these dogs?’ asked Monks, looking from one to the other of the men who stood beside him.

‘By mine,’ replied Mr. Brownlow. ‘Those persons are indemnified by me. If you complain of being deprived of your liberty—you had power and

opportunity to retrieve it as you came along, but you deemed it advisable to remain quiet—I say again, throw yourself for protection on the law. I will appeal to the law too; but when you have gone too far to recede, do not sue to me for leniency, when the power will have passed into other hands; and do not say I plunged you down the gulf into which you rushed, yourself.'

Monks was plainly disconcerted, and alarmed besides. He hesitated.

'You will decide quickly,' said Mr. Brownlow, with perfect firmness and composure. 'If you wish me to prefer my charges publicly, and consign you to a punishment the extent of which, although I can, with a shudder, foresee, I cannot control, once more, I say, for you know the way. If not, and you appeal to my forbearance, and the mercy of those you have deeply injured, seat yourself, without a word, in that chair. It has waited for you two whole days.'

Monks muttered some unintelligible words, but wavered still.

'You will be prompt,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'A word from me, and the alternative has gone for ever.'

Still the man hesitated.

'I have not the inclination to parley,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'and, as I advocate the dearest interests of others, I have not the right.'

'Is there—' demanded Monks with a faltering tongue,—'is there—no middle course?'

'None.'

Monks looked at the old gentleman, with an anxious eye; but, reading in his countenance nothing but severity and determination, walked into the room, and, shrugging his shoulders, sat down.

'Lock the door on the outside,' said Mr. Brownlow to the attendants, 'and come when I ring.'

The men obeyed, and the two were left alone together.

'This is pretty treatment, sir,' said Monks, throwing down his hat and cloak, 'from my father's oldest friend.'

'It is because I was your father's oldest friend, young man,' returned Mr. Brownlow; 'it is because the hopes and wishes of young and happy years were bound up with him, and that fair creature of his blood and kindred who rejoined her God in youth, and left me here a solitary, lonely man: it is because he knelt with me beside his only sisters' death-bed when he was yet a boy, on the morning that would—but Heaven willed otherwise—have

made her my young wife; it is because my seared heart clung to him, from that time forth, through all his trials and errors, till he died; it is because old recollections and associations filled my heart, and even the sight of you brings with it old thoughts of him; it is because of all these things that I am moved to treat you gently now—yes, Edward Leeford, even now—and blush for your unworthiness who bear the name.'

'What has the name to do with it?' asked the other, after contemplating, half in silence, and half in dogged wonder, the agitation of his companion. 'What is the name to me?'

'Nothing,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'nothing to you. But it was *hers*, and even at this distance of time brings back to me, an old man, the glow and thrill which I once felt, only to hear it repeated by a stranger. I am very glad you have changed it—very—very.'

'This is all mighty fine,' said Monks (to retain his assumed designation) after a long silence, during which he had jerked himself in sullen defiance to and fro, and Mr. Brownlow had sat, shading his face with his hand. 'But what do you want with me?'

'You have a brother,' said Mr. Brownlow, rousing himself: 'a brother, the whisper of whose name in your ear when I came behind you in the street, was, in itself, almost enough to make you accompany me hither, in wonder and alarm.'

'I have no brother,' replied Monks. 'You know I was an only child. Why do you talk to me of brothers? You know that, as well as I.'

'Attend to what I do know, and you may not,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'I shall interest you by and by. I know that of the wretched marriage, into which family pride, and the most sordid and narrowest of all ambition, forced your unhappy father when a mere boy, you were the sole and most unnatural issue.'

'I don't care for hard names,' interrupted Monks with a jeering laugh. 'You know the fact, and that's enough for me.'

'But I also know,' pursued the old gentleman, 'the misery, the slow torture, the protracted anguish of that ill-assorted union. I know how listlessly and wearily each of that wretched pair dragged on their heavy chain through a world that was poisoned to them both. I know how cold formalities were succeeded by open taunts; how indifference gave place to dislike, dislike to hate, and hate to loathing, until at last they wrenched the

clanking bond asunder, and retiring a wide space apart, carried each a galling fragment, of which nothing but death could break the rivets, to hide it in new society beneath the gayest looks they could assume. Your mother succeeded; she forgot it soon. But it rusted and cankered at your father's heart for years.'

'Well, they were separated,' said Monks, 'and what of that?'

'When they had been separated for some time,' returned Mr. Brownlow, 'and your mother, wholly given up to continental frivolities, had utterly forgotten the young husband ten good years her junior, who, with prospects blighted, lingered on at home, he fell among new friends. This circumstance, at least, you know already.'

'Not I,' said Monks, turning away his eyes and beating his foot upon the ground, as a man who is determined to deny everything. 'Not I.'

'Your manner, no less than your actions, assures me that you have never forgotten it, or ceased to think of it with bitterness,' returned Mr. Brownlow. 'I speak of fifteen years ago, when you were not more than eleven years old, and your father but one-and-thirty—for he was, I repeat, a boy, when *his* father ordered him to marry. Must I go back to events which cast a shade upon the memory of your parent, or will you spare it, and disclose to me the truth?'

'I have nothing to disclose,' rejoined Monks. 'You must talk on if you will.'

'These new friends, then,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'were a naval officer retired from active service, whose wife had died some half-a-year before, and left him with two children—there had been more, but, of all their family, happily but two survived. They were both daughters; one a beautiful creature of nineteen, and the other a mere child of two or three years old.'

'What's this to me?' asked Monks.

'They resided,' said Mr. Brownlow, without seeming to hear the interruption, 'in a part of the country to which your father in his wandering had repaired, and where he had taken up his abode. Acquaintance, intimacy, friendship, fast followed on each other. Your father was gifted as few men are. He had his sister's soul and person. As the old officer knew him more and more, he grew to love him. I would that it had ended there. His daughter did the same.'

The old gentleman paused; Monks was biting his lips, with his eyes

fixed upon the floor; seeing this, he immediately resumed:

‘The end of a year found him contracted, solemnly contracted, to that daughter; the object of the first, true, ardent, only passion of a guileless girl.’

‘Your tale is of the longest,’ observed Monks, moving restlessly in his chair.

‘It is a true tale of grief and trial, and sorrow, young man,’ returned Mr. Brownlow, ‘and such tales usually are; if it were one of unmixed joy and happiness, it would be very brief. At length one of those rich relations to strengthen whose interest and importance your father had been sacrificed, as others are often—it is no uncommon case—died, and to repair the misery he had been instrumental in occasioning, left him his panacea for all griefs —Money. It was necessary that he should immediately repair to Rome, whither this man had sped for health, and where he had died, leaving his affairs in great confusion. He went; was seized with mortal illness there; was followed, the moment the intelligence reached Paris, by your mother who carried you with her; he died the day after her arrival, leaving no will —*no will*—so that the whole property fell to her and you.’

At this part of the recital Monks held his breath, and listened with a face of intense eagerness, though his eyes were not directed towards the speaker. As Mr. Brownlow paused, he changed his position with the air of one who has experienced a sudden relief, and wiped his hot face and hands.

‘Before he went abroad, and as he passed through London on his way,’ said Mr. Brownlow, slowly, and fixing his eyes upon the other’s face, ‘he came to me.’

‘I never heard of that,’ interrupted Monks in a tone intended to appear incredulous, but savouring more of disagreeable surprise.

‘He came to me, and left with me, among some other things, a picture—a portrait painted by himself—a likeness of this poor girl—which he did not wish to leave behind, and could not carry forward on his hasty journey. He was worn by anxiety and remorse almost to a shadow; talked in a wild, distracted way, of ruin and dishonour worked by himself; confided to me his intention to convert his whole property, at any loss, into money, and, having settled on his wife and you a portion of his recent acquisition, to fly the country—I guessed too well he would not fly alone—and never see it more. Even from me, his old and early friend, whose strong attachment had

taken root in the earth that covered one most dear to both—even from me he withheld any more particular confession, promising to write and tell me all, and after that to see me once again, for the last time on earth. Alas! *That* was the last time. I had no letter, and I never saw him more.'

'I went,' said Mr. Brownlow, after a short pause, 'I went, when all was over, to the scene of his—I will use the term the world would freely use, for worldly harshness or favour are now alike to him—of his guilty love, resolved that if my fears were realised that erring child should find one heart and home to shelter and compassionate her. The family had left that part a week before; they had called in such trifling debts as were outstanding, discharged them, and left the place by night. Why, or whither, none can tell.'

Monks drew his breath yet more freely, and looked round with a smile of triumph.

'When your brother,' said Mr. Brownlow, drawing nearer to the other's chair, 'When your brother: a feeble, ragged, neglected child: was cast in my way by a stronger hand than chance, and rescued by me from a life of vice and infamy—'

'What?' cried Monks.

'By me,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'I told you I should interest you before long. I say by me—I see that your cunning associate suppressed my name, although for ought he knew, it would be quite strange to your ears. When he was rescued by me, then, and lay recovering from sickness in my house, his strong resemblance to this picture I have spoken of, struck me with astonishment. Even when I first saw him in all his dirt and misery, there was a lingering expression in his face that came upon me like a glimpse of some old friend flashing on one in a vivid dream. I need not tell you he was snared away before I knew his history—'

'Why not?' asked Monks hastily.

'Because you know it well.'

'I!'

'Denial to me is vain,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'I shall show you that I know more than that.'

'You—you—can't prove anything against me,' stammered Monks. 'I defy you to do it!'

'We shall see,' returned the old gentleman with a searching glance. 'I

lost the boy, and no efforts of mine could recover him. Your mother being dead, I knew that you alone could solve the mystery if anybody could, and as when I had last heard of you you were on your own estate in the West Indies—whither, as you well know, you retired upon your mother's death to escape the consequences of vicious courses here—I made the voyage. You had left it, months before, and were supposed to be in London, but no one could tell where. I returned. Your agents had no clue to your residence. You came and went, they said, as strangely as you had ever done: sometimes for days together and sometimes not for months: keeping to all appearance the same low haunts and mingling with the same infamous herd who had been your associates when a fierce ungovernable boy. I wearied them with new applications. I paced the streets by night and day, but until two hours ago, all my efforts were fruitless, and I never saw you for an instant.'

'And now you do see me,' said Monks, rising boldly, 'what then? Fraud and robbery are high-sounding words—justified, you think, by a fancied resemblance in some young imp to an idle daub of a dead man's Brother! You don't even know that a child was born of this maudlin pair; you don't even know that.'

'I *did not*,' replied Mr. Brownlow, rising too; 'but within the last fortnight I have learnt it all. You have a brother; you know it, and him. There was a will, which your mother destroyed, leaving the secret and the gain to you at her own death. It contained a reference to some child likely to be the result of this sad connection, which child was born, and accidentally encountered by you, when your suspicions were first awakened by his resemblance to your father. You repaired to the place of his birth. There existed proofs—proofs long suppressed—of his birth and parentage. Those proofs were destroyed by you, and now, in your own words to your accomplice the Jew, "*the only proofs of the boy's identity lie at the bottom of the river, and the old hag that received them from the mother is rotting in her coffin*." Unworthy son, coward, liar,—you, who hold your councils with thieves and murderers in dark rooms at night,—you, whose plots and wiles have brought a violent death upon the head of one worth millions such as you,—you, who from your cradle were gall and bitterness to your own father's heart, and in whom all evil passions, vice, and profligacy, festered, till they found a vent in a hideous disease which had made your face an index even to your mind—you, Edward Leeford, do you still brave me!'

‘No, no, no!’ returned the coward, overwhelmed by these accumulated charges.

‘Every word!’ cried the gentleman, ‘every word that has passed between you and this detested villain, is known to me. Shadows on the wall have caught your whispers, and brought them to my ear; the sight of the persecuted child has turned vice itself, and given it the courage and almost the attributes of virtue. Murder has been done, to which you were morally if not really a party.’

‘No, no,’ interposed Monks. ‘I—I knew nothing of that; I was going to inquire the truth of the story when you overtook me. I didn’t know the cause. I thought it was a common quarrel.’

‘It was the partial disclosure of your secrets,’ replied Mr. Brownlow. ‘Will you disclose the whole?’

‘Yes, I will.’

‘Set your hand to a statement of truth and facts, and repeat it before witnesses?’

‘That I promise too.’

‘Remain quietly here, until such a document is drawn up, and proceed with me to such a place as I may deem most advisable, for the purpose of attesting it?’

‘If you insist upon that, I’ll do that also,’ replied Monks.

‘You must do more than that,’ said Mr. Brownlow. ‘Make restitution to an innocent and unoffending child, for such he is, although the offspring of a guilty and most miserable love. You have not forgotten the provisions of the will. Carry them into execution so far as your brother is concerned, and then go where you please. In this world you need meet no more.’

While Monks was pacing up and down, meditating with dark and evil looks on this proposal and the possibilities of evading it: torn by his fears on the one hand and his hatred on the other: the door was hurriedly unlocked, and a gentleman (Mr. Losberne) entered the room in violent agitation.

‘The man will be taken,’ he cried. ‘He will be taken to-night!’

‘The murderer?’ asked Mr. Brownlow.

‘Yes, yes,’ replied the other. ‘His dog has been seen lurking about some old haunt, and there seems little doubt that his master either is, or will be, there, under cover of the darkness. Spies are hovering about in every

direction. I have spoken to the men who are charged with his capture, and they tell me he cannot escape. A reward of a hundred pounds is proclaimed by Government to-night.'

'I will give fifty more,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'and proclaim it with my own lips upon the spot, if I can reach it. Where is Mr. Maylie?'

'Harry? As soon as he had seen your friend here, safe in a coach with you, he hurried off to where he heard this,' replied the doctor, 'and mounting his horse sallied forth to join the first party at some place in the outskirts agreed upon between them.'

'Fagin,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'what of him?'

'When I last heard, he had not been taken, but he will be, or is, by this time. They're sure of him.'

'Have you made up your mind?' asked Mr. Brownlow, in a low voice, of Monks.

'Yes,' he replied. 'You—you—will be secret with me?'

'I will. Remain here till I return. It is your only hope of safety.'

They left the room, and the door was again locked.

'What have you done?' asked the doctor in a whisper.

'All that I could hope to do, and even more. Coupling the poor girl's intelligence with my previous knowledge, and the result of our good friend's inquiries on the spot, I left him no loophole of escape, and laid bare the whole villainy which by these lights became plain as day. Write and appoint the evening after to-morrow, at seven, for the meeting. We shall be down there, a few hours before, but shall require rest: especially the young lady, who *may* have greater need of firmness than either you or I can quite foresee just now. But my blood boils to avenge this poor murdered creature. Which way have they taken?'

'Drive straight to the office and you will be in time,' replied Mr. Losberne. 'I will remain here.'

The two gentlemen hastily separated; each in a fever of excitement wholly uncontrollable.

CHAPTER L

NEAR TO THAT PART of the Thames on which the church at Rotherhithe abuts, where the buildings on the banks are dirtiest and the vessels on the river blackest with the dust of colliers and the smoke of close-built low-roofed houses, there exists the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.

To reach this place, the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of waterside people, and devoted to the traffic they may be supposed to occasion. The cheapest and least delicate provisions are heaped in the shops; the coarsest and commonest articles of wearing apparel dangle at the salesman’s door, and stream from the house-parapet and windows. Jostling with unemployed labourers of the lowest class, ballast-heavers, coal-whippers, brazen women, ragged children, and the raff and refuse of the river, he makes his way with difficulty along, assailed by offensive sights and smells from the narrow alleys which branch off on the right and left, and deafened by the clash of ponderous waggons that bear great piles of merchandise from the stacks of warehouses that rise from every corner. Arriving, at length, in streets remoter and less-frequented than those through which he has passed, he walks beneath tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed half hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty iron bars that time and dirt have almost eaten away, every imaginable sign of desolation and neglect.

In such a neighborhood, beyond Dockhead in the Borough of Southwark, stands Jacob’s Island, surrounded by a muddy ditch, six or eight feet deep and fifteen or twenty wide when the tide is in, once called Mill Pond, but

known in the days of this story as Folly Ditch. It is a creek or inlet from the Thames, and can always be filled at high water by opening the sluices at the Lead Mills from which it took its old name. At such times, a stranger, looking from one of the wooden bridges thrown across it at Mill Lane, will see the inhabitants of the houses on either side lowering from their back doors and windows, buckets, pails, domestic utensils of all kinds, in which to haul the water up; and when his eye is turned from these operations to the houses themselves, his utmost astonishment will be excited by the scene before him. Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half a dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath; windows, broken and patched, with poles thrust out, on which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud, and threatening to fall into it—as some have done; dirt-besmeared walls and decaying foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathsome indication of filth, rot, and garbage; all these ornament the banks of Folly Ditch.

In Jacob's Island, the warehouses are roofless and empty; the walls are crumbling down; the windows are windows no more; the doors are falling into the streets; the chimneys are blackened, but they yield no smoke. Thirty or forty years ago, before losses and chancery suits came upon it, it was a thriving place; but now it is a desolate island indeed. The houses have no owners; they are broken open, and entered upon by those who have the courage; and there they live, and there they die. They must have powerful motives for a secret residence, or be reduced to a destitute condition indeed, who seek a refuge in Jacob's Island.

In an upper room of one of these houses—a detached house of fair size, ruinous in other respects, but strongly defended at door and window: of which house the back commanded the ditch in manner already described—there were assembled three men, who, regarding each other every now and then with looks expressive of perplexity and expectation, sat for some time in profound and gloomy silence. One of these was Toby Crackit, another Mr. Chitling, and the third a robber of fifty years, whose nose had been almost beaten in, in some old scuffle, and whose face bore a frightful scar which might probably be traced to the same occasion. This man was a

returned transport, and his name was Kags.

‘I wish,’ said Toby turning to Mr. Chitling, ‘that you had picked out some other crib when the two old ones got too warm, and had not come here, my fine feller.’

‘Why didn’t you, blunder-head!’ said Kags.

‘Well, I thought you’d have been a little more glad to see me than this,’ replied Mr. Chitling, with a melancholy air.

‘Why, look’e, young gentleman,’ said Toby, ‘when a man keeps himself so very ex-clusive as I have done, and by that means has a snug house over his head with nobody a prying and smelling about it, it’s rather a startling thing to have the honour of a wisit from a young gentleman (however respectable and pleasant a person he may be to play cards with at conweniency) circumstanced as you are.’

‘Especially, when the exclusive young man has got a friend stopping with him, that’s arrived sooner than was expected from foreign parts, and is too modest to want to be presented to the Judges on his return,’ added Mr. Kags.

There was a short silence, after which Toby Crackit, seeming to abandon as hopeless any further effort to maintain his usual devil-may-care swagger, turned to Chitling and said,

‘When was Fagin took then?’

‘Just at dinner-time—two o’clock this afternoon. Charley and I made our lucky up the wash-us chimney, and Bolter got into the empty water-butt, head downwards; but his legs were so precious long that they stuck out at the top, and so they took him too.’

‘And Bet?’

‘Poor Bet! She went to see the Body, to speak to who it was,’ replied Chitling, his countenance falling more and more, ‘and went off mad, screaming and raving, and beating her head against the boards; so they put a strait-weskut on her and took her to the hospital—and there she is.’

‘Wot’s come of young Bates?’ demanded Kags.

‘He hung about, not to come over here afore dark, but he’ll be here soon,’ replied Chitling. ‘There’s nowhere else to go to now, for the people at the Cripples are all in custody, and the bar of the ken—I went up there and see it with my own eyes—is filled with traps.’

‘This is a smash,’ observed Toby, biting his lips. ‘There’s more than one

will go with this.’

‘The sessions are on,’ said Kags: ‘if they get the inquest over, and Bolter turns King’s evidence: as of course he will, from what he’s said already: they can prove Fagin an accessory before the fact, and get the trial on on Friday, and he’ll swing in six days from this, by G—!’

‘You should have heard the people groan,’ said Chitling; ‘the officers fought like devils, or they’d have torn him away. He was down once, but they made a ring round him, and fought their way along. You should have seen how he looked about him, all muddy and bleeding, and clung to them as if they were his dearest friends. I can see ’em now, not able to stand upright with the pressing of the mob, and draggin him along amongst ’em; I can see the people jumping up, one behind another, and snarling with their teeth and making at him; I can see the blood upon his hair and beard, and hear the cries with which the women worked themselves into the centre of the crowd at the street corner, and swore they’d tear his heart out!’

The horror-stricken witness of this scene pressed his hands upon his ears, and with his eyes closed got up and paced violently to and fro, like one distracted.

While he was thus engaged, and the two men sat by in silence with their eyes fixed upon the floor, a pattering noise was heard upon the stairs, and Sikes’s dog bounded into the room. They ran to the window, downstairs, and into the street. The dog had jumped in at an open window; he made no attempt to follow them, nor was his master to be seen.

‘What’s the meaning of this?’ said Toby when they had returned. ‘He can’t be coming here. I—I—hope not.’

‘If he was coming here, he’d have come with the dog,’ said Kags, stooping down to examine the animal, who lay panting on the floor. ‘Here! Give us some water for him; he has run himself faint.’

‘He’s drunk it all up, every drop,’ said Chitling after watching the dog some time in silence. ‘Covered with mud—lame—half blind—he must have come a long way.’

‘Where can he have come from!’ exclaimed Toby. ‘He’s been to the other kens of course, and finding them filled with strangers come on here, where he’s been many a time and often. But where can he have come from first, and how comes he here alone without the other!’

‘He’—(none of them called the murderer by his old name)—‘He can’t

have made away with himself. What do you think?' said Chitling.

Toby shook his head.

'If he had,' said Kags, 'the dog 'ud want to lead us away to where he did it. No. I think he's got out of the country, and left the dog behind. He must have given him the slip somehow, or he wouldn't be so easy.'

This solution, appearing the most probable one, was adopted as the right; the dog, creeping under a chair, coiled himself up to sleep, without more notice from anybody.

It being now dark, the shutter was closed, and a candle lighted and placed upon the table. The terrible events of the last two days had made a deep impression on all three, increased by the danger and uncertainty of their own position. They drew their chairs closer together, starting at every sound. They spoke little, and that in whispers, and were as silent and awe-stricken as if the remains of the murdered woman lay in the next room.

They had sat thus, some time, when suddenly was heard a hurried knocking at the door below.

'Young Bates,' said Kags, looking angrily round, to check the fear he felt himself.

The knocking came again. No, it wasn't he. He never knocked like that.

Crackit went to the window, and shaking all over, drew in his head. There was no need to tell them who it was; his pale face was enough. The dog too was on the alert in an instant, and ran whining to the door.

'We must let him in,' he said, taking up the candle.

'Isn't there any help for it?' asked the other man in a hoarse voice.

'None. He *must* come in.'

'Don't leave us in the dark,' said Kags, taking down a candle from the chimney-piece, and lighting it, with such a trembling hand that the knocking was twice repeated before he had finished.

Crackit went down to the door, and returned followed by a man with the lower part of his face buried in a handkerchief, and another tied over his head under his hat. He drew them slowly off. Blanched face, sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, beard of three days' growth, wasted flesh, short thick breath; it was the very ghost of Sikes.

He laid his hand upon a chair which stood in the middle of the room, but shuddering as he was about to drop into it, and seeming to glance over his shoulder, dragged it back close to the wall—as close as it would go—and

ground it against it—and sat down.

Not a word had been exchanged. He looked from one to another in silence. If an eye were furtively raised and met his, it was instantly averted. When his hollow voice broke silence, they all three started. They seemed never to have heard its tones before.

‘How came that dog here?’ he asked.

‘Alone. Three hours ago.’

‘To-night’s paper says that Fagin’s took. Is it true, or a lie?’

‘True.’

They were silent again.

‘Damn you all!’ said Sikes, passing his hand across his forehead.

‘Have you nothing to say to me?’

There was an uneasy movement among them, but nobody spoke.

‘You that keep this house,’ said Sikes, turning his face to Crackit, ‘do you mean to sell me, or to let me lie here till this hunt is over?’

‘You may stop here, if you think it safe,’ returned the person addressed, after some hesitation.

Sikes carried his eyes slowly up the wall behind him: rather trying to turn his head than actually doing it: and said, ‘Is—it—the body—is it buried?’

They shook their heads.

‘Why isn’t it!’ he retorted with the same glance behind him. ‘Wot do they keep such ugly things above the ground for?—Who’s that knocking?’

Crackit intimated, by a motion of his hand as he left the room, that there was nothing to fear; and directly came back with Charley Bates behind him. Sikes sat opposite the door, so that the moment the boy entered the room he encountered his figure.

‘Toby,’ said the boy falling back, as Sikes turned his eyes towards him, ‘why didn’t you tell me this, downstairs?’

There had been something so tremendous in the shrinking off of the three, that the wretched man was willing to propitiate even this lad. Accordingly he nodded, and made as though he would shake hands with him.

‘Let me go into some other room,’ said the boy, retreating still farther.

‘Charley!’ said Sikes, stepping forward. ‘Don’t you—don’t you know me?’

‘Don’t come nearer me,’ answered the boy, still retreating, and looking, with horror in his eyes, upon the murderer’s face. ‘You monster!’

The man stopped half-way, and they looked at each other; but Sikes’s eyes sunk gradually to the ground.

‘Witness you three,’ cried the boy shaking his clenched fist, and becoming more and more excited as he spoke. ‘Witness you three—I’m not afraid of him—if they come here after him, I’ll give him up; I will. I tell you out at once. He may kill me for it if he likes, or if he dares, but if I am here I’ll give him up. I’d give him up if he was to be boiled alive. Murder! Help! If there’s the pluck of a man among you three, you’ll help me. Murder! Help! Down with him!’

Pouring out these cries, and accompanying them with violent gesticulation, the boy actually threw himself, single-handed, upon the strong man, and in the intensity of his energy and the suddenness of his surprise, brought him heavily to the ground.

The three spectators seemed quite stupefied. They offered no interference, and the boy and man rolled on the ground together; the former, heedless of the blows that showered upon him, wrenching his hands tighter and tighter in the garments about the murderer’s breast, and never ceasing to call for help with all his might.

The contest, however, was too unequal to last long. Sikes had him down, and his knee was on his throat, when Crackit pulled him back with a look of alarm, and pointed to the window. There were lights gleaming below, voices in loud and earnest conversation, the tramp of hurried footsteps—endless they seemed in number—crossing the nearest wooden bridge. One man on horseback seemed to be among the crowd; for there was the noise of hoofs rattling on the uneven pavement. The gleam of lights increased; the footsteps came more thickly and noisily on. Then, came a loud knocking at the door, and then a hoarse murmur from such a multitude of angry voices as would have made the boldest quail.

‘Help!’ shrieked the boy in a voice that rent the air.

‘He’s here! Break down the door!’

‘In the King’s name,’ cried the voices without; and the hoarse cry arose again, but louder.

‘Break down the door!’ screamed the boy. ‘I tell you they’ll never open it. Run straight to the room where the light is. Break down the door!’

Strokes, thick and heavy, rattled upon the door and lower window-shutters as he ceased to speak, and a loud huzzah burst from the crowd; giving the listener, for the first time, some adequate idea of its immense extent.

‘Open the door of some place where I can lock this screeching Hell-babe,’ cried Sikes fiercely; running to and fro, and dragging the boy, now, as easily as if he were an empty sack. ‘That door. Quick!’ He flung him in, bolted it, and turned the key. ‘Is the downstairs door fast?’

‘Double-locked and chained,’ replied Crackit, who, with the other two men, still remained quite helpless and bewildered.

‘The panels—are they strong?’

‘Lined with sheet-iron.’

‘And the windows too?’

‘Yes, and the windows.’

‘Damn you!’ cried the desperate ruffian, throwing up the sash and menacing the crowd. ‘Do your worst! I’ll cheat you yet!’

Of all the terrific yells that ever fell on mortal ears, none could exceed the cry of the infuriated throng. Some shouted to those who were nearest to set the house on fire; others roared to the officers to shoot him dead. Among them all, none showed such fury as the man on horseback, who, throwing himself out of the saddle, and bursting through the crowd as if he were parting water, cried, beneath the window, in a voice that rose above all others, ‘Twenty guineas to the man who brings a ladder!’

The nearest voices took up the cry, and hundreds echoed it. Some called for ladders, some for sledge-hammers; some ran with torches to and fro as if to seek them, and still came back and roared again; some spent their breath in impotent curses and execrations; some pressed forward with the ecstasy of madmen, and thus impeded the progress of those below; some among the boldest attempted to climb up by the water-spout and crevices in the wall; and all waved to and fro, in the darkness beneath, like a field of corn moved by an angry wind: and joined from time to time in one loud furious roar.

‘The tide,’ cried the murderer, as he staggered back into the room, and shut the faces out, ‘the tide was in as I came up. Give me a rope, a long rope. They’re all in front. I may drop into the Folly Ditch, and clear off that way. Give me a rope, or I shall do three more murders and kill myself.’

The panic-stricken men pointed to where such articles were kept; the murderer, hastily selecting the longest and strongest cord, hurried up to the house-top.

All the window in the rear of the house had been long ago bricked up, except one small trap in the room where the boy was locked, and that was too small even for the passage of his body. But, from this aperture, he had never ceased to call on those without, to guard the back; and thus, when the murderer emerged at last on the house-top by the door in the roof, a loud shout proclaimed the fact to those in front, who immediately began to pour round, pressing upon each other in an unbroken stream.

He planted a board, which he had carried up with him for the purpose, so firmly against the door that it must be matter of great difficulty to open it from the inside; and creeping over the tiles, looked over the low parapet.

The water was out, and the ditch a bed of mud.

The crowd had been hushed during these few moments, watching his motions and doubtful of his purpose, but the instant they perceived it and knew it was defeated, they raised a cry of triumphant execration to which all their previous shouting had been whispers. Again and again it rose. Those who were at too great a distance to know its meaning, took up the sound; it echoed and re-echoed; it seemed as though the whole city had poured its population out to curse him.

On pressed the people from the front—on, on, on, in a strong struggling current of angry faces, with here and there a glaring torch to lighten them up, and show them out in all their wrath and passion. The houses on the opposite side of the ditch had been entered by the mob; sashes were thrown up, or torn bodily out; there were tiers and tiers of faces in every window; cluster upon cluster of people clinging to every house-top. Each little bridge (and there were three in sight) bent beneath the weight of the crowd upon it. Still the current poured on to find some nook or hole from which to vent their shouts, and only for an instant see the wretch.

‘They have him now,’ cried a man on the nearest bridge. ‘Hurrah!’

The crowd grew light with uncovered heads; and again the shout uprose.

‘I will give fifty pounds,’ cried an old gentleman from the same quarter, ‘to the man who takes him alive. I will remain here, till he come to ask me for it.’

There was another roar. At this moment the word was passed among the

crowd that the door was forced at last, and that he who had first called for the ladder had mounted into the room. The stream abruptly turned, as this intelligence ran from mouth to mouth; and the people at the windows, seeing those upon the bridges pouring back, quitted their stations, and running into the street, joined the concourse that now thronged pell-mell to the spot they had left: each man crushing and striving with his neighbor, and all panting with impatience to get near the door, and look upon the criminal as the officers brought him out. The cries and shrieks of those who were pressed almost to suffocation, or trampled down and trodden under foot in the confusion, were dreadful; the narrow ways were completely blocked up; and at this time, between the rush of some to regain the space in front of the house, and the unavailing struggles of others to extricate themselves from the mass, the immediate attention was distracted from the murderer, although the universal eagerness for his capture was, if possible, increased.

The man had shrunk down, thoroughly quelled by the ferocity of the crowd, and the impossibility of escape; but seeing this sudden change with no less rapidity than it had occurred, he sprang upon his feet, determined to make one last effort for his life by dropping into the ditch, and, at the risk of being stifled, endeavouring to creep away in the darkness and confusion.

Roused into new strength and energy, and stimulated by the noise within the house which announced that an entrance had really been effected, he set his foot against the stack of chimneys, fastened one end of the rope tightly and firmly round it, and with the other made a strong running noose by the aid of his hands and teeth almost in a second. He could let himself down by the cord to within a less distance of the ground than his own height, and had his knife ready in his hand to cut it then and drop.

At the very instant when he brought the loop over his head previous to slipping it beneath his arm-pits, and when the old gentleman before-mentioned (who had clung so tight to the railing of the bridge as to resist the force of the crowd, and retain his position) earnestly warned those about him that the man was about to lower himself down—at that very instant the murderer, looking behind him on the roof, threw his arms above his head, and uttered a yell of terror.

‘The eyes again!’ he cried in an unearthly screech.

Staggering as if struck by lightning, he lost his balance and tumbled over

the parapet. The noose was on his neck. It ran up with his weight, tight as a bow-string, and swift as the arrow it speeds. He fell for five-and-thirty feet. There was a sudden jerk, a terrific convulsion of the limbs; and there he hung, with the open knife clenched in his stiffening hand.

The old chimney quivered with the shock, but stood it bravely. The murderer swung lifeless against the wall; and the boy, thrusting aside the dangling body which obscured his view, called to the people to come and take him out, for God’s sake.

A dog, which had lain concealed till now, ran backwards and forwards on the parapet with a dismal howl, and collecting himself for a spring, jumped for the dead man’s shoulders. Missing his aim, he fell into the ditch, turning completely over as he went; and striking his head against a stone, dashed out his brains.

CHAPTER LI

THE EVENTS NARRATED IN the last chapter were yet but two days old, when Oliver found himself, at three o’clock in the afternoon, in a travelling-carriage rolling fast towards his native town. Mrs. Maylie, and Rose, and Mrs. Bedwin, and the good doctor were with him: and Mr. Brownlow followed in a post-chaise, accompanied by one other person whose name had not been mentioned.

They had not talked much upon the way; for Oliver was in a flutter of agitation and uncertainty which deprived him of the power of collecting his thoughts, and almost of speech, and appeared to have scarcely less effect on his companions, who shared it, in at least an equal degree. He and the two ladies had been very carefully made acquainted by Mr. Brownlow with the nature of the admissions which had been forced from Monks; and although they knew that the object of their present journey was to complete the work which had been so well begun, still the whole matter was enveloped in enough of doubt and mystery to leave them in endurance of the most intense suspense.

The same kind friend had, with Mr. Losberne’s assistance, cautiously stopped all channels of communication through which they could receive intelligence of the dreadful occurrences that so recently taken place. ‘It was quite true,’ he said, ‘that they must know them before long, but it might be at a better time than the present, and it could not be at a worse.’ So, they travelled on in silence: each busied with reflections on the object which had brought them together: and no one disposed to give utterance to the thoughts which crowded upon all.

But if Oliver, under these influences, had remained silent while they journeyed towards his birth-place by a road he had never seen, how the whole current of his recollections ran back to old times, and what a crowd

of emotions were wakened up in his breast, when they turned into that which he had traversed on foot: a poor houseless, wandering boy, without a friend to help him, or a roof to shelter his head.

‘See there, there!’ cried Oliver, eagerly clasping the hand of Rose, and pointing out at the carriage window; ‘that’s the stile I came over; there are the hedges I crept behind, for fear any one should overtake me and force me back! Yonder is the path across the fields, leading to the old house where I was a little child! Oh Dick, Dick, my dear old friend, if I could only see you now!’

‘You will see him soon,’ replied Rose, gently taking his folded hands between her own. ‘You shall tell him how happy you are, and how rich you have grown, and that in all your happiness you have none so great as the coming back to make him happy too.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Oliver, ‘and we’ll—we’ll take him away from here, and have him clothed and taught, and send him to some quiet country place where he may grow strong and well,—shall we?’

Rose nodded ‘yes,’ for the boy was smiling through such happy tears that she could not speak.

‘You will be kind and good to him, for you are to every one,’ said Oliver. ‘It will make you cry, I know, to hear what he can tell; but never mind, never mind, it will be all over, and you will smile again—I know that too—to think how changed he is; you did the same with me. He said “God bless you” to me when I ran away,’ cried the boy with a burst of affectionate emotion; ‘and I will say “God bless you” now, and show him how I love him for it!’

As they approached the town, and at length drove through its narrow streets, it became matter of no small difficulty to restrain the boy within reasonable bounds. There was Sowerberry’s the undertaker’s just as it used to be, only smaller and less imposing in appearance than he remembered it—there were all the well-known shops and houses, with almost every one of which he had some slight incident connected—there was Gamfield’s cart, the very cart he used to have, standing at the old public-house door—there was the workhouse, the dreary prison of his youthful days, with its dismal windows frowning on the street—there was the same lean porter standing at the gate, at sight of whom Oliver involuntarily shrunk back, and then laughed at himself for being so foolish, then cried, then laughed again—

there were scores of faces at the doors and windows that he knew quite well—there was nearly everything as if he had left it but yesterday, and all his recent life had been but a happy dream.

But it was pure, earnest, joyful reality. They drove straight to the door of the chief hotel (which Oliver used to stare up at, with awe, and think a mighty palace, but which had somehow fallen off in grandeur and size); and here was Mr. Grimwig all ready to receive them, kissing the young lady, and the old one too, when they got out of the coach, as if he were the grandfather of the whole party, all smiles and kindness, and not offering to eat his head—no, not once; not even when he contradicted a very old postboy about the nearest road to London, and maintained he knew it best, though he had only come that way once, and that time fast asleep. There was dinner prepared, and there were bedrooms ready, and everything was arranged as if by magic.

Notwithstanding all this, when the hurry of the first half-hour was over, the same silence and constraint prevailed that had marked their journey down. Mr. Brownlow did not join them at dinner, but remained in a separate room. The two other gentlemen hurried in and out with anxious faces, and, during the short intervals when they were present, conversed apart. Once, Mrs. Maylie was called away, and after being absent for nearly an hour, returned with eyes swollen with weeping. All these things made Rose and Oliver, who were not in any new secrets, nervous and uncomfortable. They sat wondering, in silence; or, if they exchanged a few words, spoke in whispers, as if they were afraid to hear the sound of their own voices.

At length, when nine o'clock had come, and they began to think they were to hear no more that night, Mr. Losberne and Mr. Grimwig entered the room, followed by Mr. Brownlow and a man whom Oliver almost shrieked with surprise to see; for they told him it was his brother, and it was the same man he had met at the market-town, and seen looking in with Fagin at the window of his little room. Monks cast a look of hate, which, even then, he could not dissemble, at the astonished boy, and sat down near the door. Mr. Brownlow, who had papers in his hand, walked to a table near which Rose and Oliver were seated.

'This is a painful task,' said he, 'but these declarations, which have been signed in London before many gentlemen, must be in substance repeated here. I would have spared you the degradation, but we must hear them from

your own lips before we part, and you know why.’

‘Go on,’ said the person addressed, turning away his face. ‘Quick. I have almost done enough, I think. Don’t keep me here.’

‘This child,’ said Mr. Brownlow, drawing Oliver to him, and laying his hand upon his head, ‘is your half-brother; the illegitimate son of your father, my dear friend Edwin Leeford, by poor young Agnes Fleming, who died in giving him birth.’

‘Yes,’ said Monks, scowling at the trembling boy: the beating of whose heart he might have heard. ‘That is the bastard child.’

‘The term you use,’ said Mr. Brownlow, sternly, ‘is a reproach to those long since passed beyond the feeble censure of the world. It reflects disgrace on no one living, except you who use it. Let that pass. He was born in this town.’

‘In the workhouse of this town,’ was the sullen reply. ‘You have the story there.’ He pointed impatiently to the papers as he spoke.

‘I must have it here, too,’ said Mr. Brownlow, looking round upon the listeners.

‘Listen then! You!’ returned Monks. ‘His father being taken ill at Rome, was joined by his wife, my mother, from whom he had been long separated, who went from Paris and took me with her—to look after his property, for what I know, for she had no great affection for him, nor he for her. He knew nothing of us, for his senses were gone, and he slumbered on till next day, when he died. Among the papers in his desk, were two, dated on the night his illness first came on, directed to yourself’; he addressed himself to Mr. Brownlow; ‘and enclosed in a few short lines to you, with an intimation on the cover of the package that it was not to be forwarded till after he was dead. One of these papers was a letter to this girl Agnes; the other a will.’

‘What of the letter?’ asked Mr. Brownlow.

‘The letter?—A sheet of paper crossed and crossed again, with a penitent confession, and prayers to God to help her. He had palmed a tale on the girl that some secret mystery—to be explained one day—prevented his marrying her just then; and so she had gone on, trusting patiently to him, until she trusted too far, and lost what none could ever give her back. She was, at that time, within a few months of her confinement. He told her all he had meant to do, to hide her shame, if he had lived, and prayed her, if he died, not to curse his memory, or think the consequences of their sin would

be visited on her or their young child; for all the guilt was his. He reminded her of the day he had given her the little locket and the ring with her christian name engraved upon it, and a blank left for that which he hoped one day to have bestowed upon her—prayed her yet to keep it, and wear it next her heart, as she had done before—and then ran on, wildly, in the same words, over and over again, as if he had gone distracted. I believe he had.'

'The will,' said Mr. Brownlow, as Oliver's tears fell fast.

Monks was silent.

'The will,' said Mr. Brownlow, speaking for him, 'was in the same spirit as the letter. He talked of miseries which his wife had brought upon him; of the rebellious disposition, vice, malice, and premature bad passions of you his only son, who had been trained to hate him; and left you, and your mother, each an annuity of eight hundred pounds. The bulk of his property he divided into two equal portions—one for Agnes Fleming, and the other for their child, if it should be born alive, and ever come of age. If it were a girl, it was to inherit the money unconditionally; but if a boy, only on the stipulation that in his minority he should never have stained his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong. He did this, he said, to mark his confidence in the other, and his conviction—only strengthened by approaching death—that the child would share her gentle heart, and noble nature. If he were disappointed in this expectation, then the money was to come to you: for then, and not till then, when both children were equal, would he recognise your prior claim upon his purse, who had none upon his heart, but had, from an infant, repulsed him with coldness and aversion.'

'My mother,' said Monks, in a louder tone, 'did what a woman should have done. She burnt this will. The letter never reached its destination; but that, and other proofs, she kept, in case they ever tried to lie away the blot. The girl's father had the truth from her with every aggravation that her violent hate—I love her for it now—could add. Goaded by shame and dishonour he fled with his children into a remote corner of Wales, changing his very name that his friends might never know of his retreat; and here, no great while afterwards, he was found dead in his bed. The girl had left her home, in secret, some weeks before; he had searched for her, on foot, in every town and village near; it was on the night when he returned home, assured that she had destroyed herself, to hide her shame and his, that his

old heart broke.’

There was a short silence here, until Mr. Brownlow took up the thread of the narrative.

‘Years after this,’ he said, ‘this man’s—Edward Leeford’s—mother came to me. He had left her, when only eighteen; robbed her of jewels and money; gambled, squandered, forged, and fled to London: where for two years he had associated with the lowest outcasts. She was sinking under a painful and incurable disease, and wished to recover him before she died. Inquiries were set on foot, and strict searches made. They were unavailing for a long time, but ultimately successful; and he went back with her to France.’

‘There she died,’ said Monks, ‘after a lingering illness; and, on her death-bed, she bequeathed these secrets to me, together with her unquenchable and deadly hatred of all whom they involved—though she need not have left me that, for I had inherited it long before. She would not believe that the girl had destroyed herself, and the child too, but was filled with the impression that a male child had been born, and was alive. I swore to her, if ever it crossed my path, to hunt it down; never to let it rest; to pursue it with the bitterest and most unrelenting animosity; to vent upon it the hatred that I deeply felt, and to spit upon the empty vaunt of that insulting will by draggin it, if I could, to the very gallows-foot. She was right. He came in my way at last. I began well; and, but for babbling drabs, I would have finished as I began!’

As the villain folded his arms tight together, and muttered curses on himself in the impotence of baffled malice, Mr. Brownlow turned to the terrified group beside him, and explained that the Jew, who had been his old accomplice and confidant, had a large reward for keeping Oliver ensnared: of which some part was to be given up, in the event of his being rescued: and that a dispute on this head had led to their visit to the country house for the purpose of identifying him.

‘The locket and ring?’ said Mr. Brownlow, turning to Monks.

‘I bought them from the man and woman I told you of, who stole them from the nurse, who stole them from the corpse,’ answered Monks without raising his eyes. ‘You know what became of them.’

Mr. Brownlow merely nodded to Mr. Grimwig, who disappearing with great alacrity, shortly returned, pushing in Mrs. Bumble, and dragging her

unwilling consort after him.

‘Do my hi’s deceive me!’ cried Mr. Bumble, with ill-feigned enthusiasm, ‘or is that little Oliver? Oh O-li-ver, if you know’d how I’ve been a-grieving for you—’

‘Hold your tongue, fool,’ murmured Mrs. Bumble.

‘Isn’t natur, natur, Mrs. Bumble?’ remonstrated the workhouse master. ‘Can’t I be supposed to feel—*I* as brought him up porochially—when I see him a-setting here among ladies and gentlemen of the very affablest description! I always loved that boy as if he’d been my—my—my own grandfather,’ said Mr. Bumble, halting for an appropriate comparison. ‘Master Oliver, my dear, you remember the blessed gentleman in the white waistcoat? Ah! he went to heaven last week, in a oak coffin with plated handles, Oliver.’

‘Come, sir,’ said Mr. Grimwig, tartly; ‘suppress your feelings.’

‘I will do my endeavours, sir,’ replied Mr. Bumble. ‘How do you do, sir? I hope you are very well.’

This salutation was addressed to Mr. Brownlow, who had stepped up to within a short distance of the respectable couple. He inquired, as he pointed to Monks,

‘Do you know that person?’

‘No,’ replied Mrs. Bumble flatly.

‘Perhaps *you* don’t?’ said Mr. Brownlow, addressing her spouse.

‘I never saw him in all my life,’ said Mr. Bumble.

‘Nor sold him anything, perhaps?’

‘No,’ replied Mrs. Bumble.

‘You never had, perhaps, a certain gold locket and ring?’ said Mr. Brownlow.

‘Certainly not,’ replied the matron. ‘Why are we brought here to answer to such nonsense as this?’

Again Mr. Brownlow nodded to Mr. Grimwig; and again that gentleman limped away with extraordinary readiness. But not again did he return with a stout man and wife; for this time, he led in two palsied women, who shook and tottered as they walked.

‘You shut the door the night old Sally died,’ said the foremost one, raising her shrivelled hand, ‘but you couldn’t shut out the sound, nor stop the chinks.’

‘No, no,’ said the other, looking round her and wagging her toothless jaws. ‘No, no, no.’

‘We heard her try to tell you what she’d done, and saw you take a paper from her hand, and watched you too, next day, to the pawnbroker’s shop,’ said the first.

‘Yes,’ added the second, ‘and it was a “locket and gold ring.” We found out that, and saw it given you. We were by. Oh! we were by.’

‘And we know more than that,’ resumed the first, ‘for she told us often, long ago, that the young mother had told her that, feeling she should never get over it, she was on her way, at the time that she was taken ill, to die near the grave of the father of the child.’

‘Would you like to see the pawnbroker himself?’ asked Mr. Grimwig with a motion towards the door.

‘No,’ replied the woman; ‘if he—she pointed to Monks—‘has been coward enough to confess, as I see he has, and you have sounded all these hags till you have found the right ones, I have nothing more to say. I *did* sell them, and they’re where you’ll never get them. What then?’

‘Nothing,’ replied Mr. Brownlow, ‘except that it remains for us to take care that neither of you is employed in a situation of trust again. You may leave the room.’

‘I hope,’ said Mr. Bumble, looking about him with great ruefulness, as Mr. Grimwig disappeared with the two old women: ‘I hope that this unfortunate little circumstance will not deprive me of my porochial office?’

‘Indeed it will,’ replied Mr. Brownlow. ‘You may make up your mind to that, and think yourself well off besides.’

‘It was all Mrs. Bumble. She *would* do it,’ urged Mr. Bumble; first looking round to ascertain that his partner had left the room.

‘That is no excuse,’ replied Mr. Brownlow. ‘You were present on the occasion of the destruction of these trinkets, and indeed are the more guilty of the two, in the eye of the law; for the law supposes that your wife acts under your direction.’

‘If the law supposes that,’ said Mr. Bumble, squeezing his hat emphatically in both hands, ‘the law is a ass—a idiot. If that’s the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is, that his eye may be opened by experience—by experience.’

Laying great stress on the repetition of these two words, Mr. Bumble

fixed his hat on very tight, and putting his hands in his pockets, followed his helpmate downstairs.

‘Young lady,’ said Mr. Brownlow, turning to Rose, ‘give me your hand. Do not tremble. You need not fear to hear the few remaining words we have to say.’

‘If they have—I do not know how they can, but if they have—any reference to me,’ said Rose, ‘pray let me hear them at some other time. I have not strength or spirits now.’

‘Nay,’ returned the old gentlman, drawing her arm through his; ‘you have more fortitude than this, I am sure. Do you know this young lady, sir?’

‘Yes,’ replied Monks.

‘I never saw you before,’ said Rose faintly.

‘I have seen you often,’ returned Monks.

‘The father of the unhappy Agnes had *two* daughters,’ said Mr. Brownlow. ‘What was the fate of the other—the child?’

‘The child,’ replied Monks, ‘when her father died in a strange place, in a strange name, without a letter, book, or scrap of paper that yielded the faintest clue by which his friends or relatives could be traced—the child was taken by some wretched cottagers, who reared it as their own.’

‘Go on,’ said Mr. Brownlow, signing to Mrs. Maylie to approach. ‘Go on!’

‘You couldn’t find the spot to which these people had repaired,’ said Monks, ‘but where friendship fails, hatred will often force a way. My mother found it, after a year of cunning search—ay, and found the child.’

‘She took it, did she?’

‘No. The people were poor and began to sicken—at least the man did—of their fine humanity; so she left it with them, giving them a small present of money which would not last long, and promised more, which she never meant to send. She didn’t quite rely, however, on their discontent and poverty for the child’s unhappiness, but told the history of the sister’s shame, with such alterations as suited her; bade them take good heed of the child, for she came of bad blood; and told them she was illegitimate, and sure to go wrong at one time or other. The circumstances countenanced all this; the people believed it; and there the child dragged on an existence, miserable enough even to satisfy us, until a widow lady, residing, then, at Chester, saw the girl by chance, pitied her, and took her home. There was

some cursed spell, I think, against us; for in spite of all our efforts she remained there and was happy. I lost sight of her, two or three years ago, and saw her no more until a few months back.'

'Do you see her now?'

'Yes. Leaning on your arm.'

'But not the less my niece,' cried Mrs. Maylie, folding the fainting girl in her arms; 'not the less my dearest child. I would not lose her now, for all the treasures of the world. My sweet companion, my own dear girl!'

'The only friend I ever had,' cried Rose, clinging to her. 'The kindest, best of friends. My heart will burst. I cannot bear all this.'

'You have borne more, and have been, through all, the best and gentlest creature that ever shed happiness on every one she knew,' said Mrs. Maylie, embracing her tenderly. 'Come, come, my love, remember who this is who waits to clasp you in his arms, poor child! See here—look, look, my dear!'

'Not aunt,' cried Oliver, throwing his arms about her neck; 'I'll never call her aunt—sister, my own dear sister, that something taught my heart to love so dearly from the first! Rose, dear, darling Rose!'

Let the tears which fell, and the broken words which were exchanged in the long close embrace between the orphans, be sacred. A father, sister, and mother, were gained, and lost, in that one moment. Joy and grief were mingled in the cup; but there were no bitter tears: for even grief itself arose so softened, and clothed in such sweet and tender recollections, that it became a solemn pleasure, and lost all character of pain.

They were a long, long time alone. A soft tap at the door, at length announced that some one was without. Oliver opened it, glided away, and gave place to Harry Maylie.

'I know it all,' he said, taking a seat beside the lovely girl. 'Dear Rose, I know it all.'

'I am not here by accident,' he added after a lengthened silence; 'nor have I heard all this to-night, for I knew it yesterday—only yesterday. Do you guess that I have come to remind you of a promise?'

'Stay,' said Rose. 'You *do* know all.'

'All. You gave me leave, at any time within a year, to renew the subject of our last discourse.'

'I did.'

'Not to press you to alter your determination,' pursued the young man,

‘but to hear you repeat it, if you would. I was to lay whatever of station or fortune I might possess at your feet, and if you still adhered to your former determination, I pledged myself, by no word or act, to seek to change it.’

‘The same reasons which influenced me then, will influence me now,’ said Rose firmly. ‘If I ever owed a strict and rigid duty to her, whose goodness saved me from a life of indigence and suffering, when should I ever feel it, as I should to-night? It is a struggle,’ said Rose, ‘but one I am proud to make; it is a pang, but one my heart shall bear.’

‘The disclosure of to-night,’—Harry began.

‘The disclosure of to-night,’ replied Rose softly, ‘leaves me in the same position, with reference to you, as that in which I stood before.’

‘You harden your heart against me, Rose,’ urged her lover.

‘Oh Harry, Harry,’ said the young lady, bursting into tears; ‘I wish I could, and spare myself this pain.’

‘Then why inflict it on yourself?’ said Harry, taking her hand. ‘Think, dear Rose, think what you have heard to-night.’

‘And what have I heard! What have I heard!’ cried Rose. ‘That a sense of his deep disgrace so worked upon my own father that he shunned all—there, we have said enough, Harry, we have said enough.’

‘Not yet, not yet,’ said the young man, detaining her as she rose. ‘My hopes, my wishes, prospects, feeling: every thought in life except my love for you: have undergone a change. I offer you, now, no distinction among a bustling crowd; no mingling with a world of malice and detraction, where the blood is called into honest cheeks by aught but real disgrace and shame; but a home—a heart and home—yes, dearest Rose, and those, and those alone, are all I have to offer.’

‘What do you mean!’ she faltered.

‘I mean but this—that when I left you last, I left you with a firm determination to level all fancied barriers between yourself and me; resolved that if my world could not be yours, I would make yours mine; that no pride of birth should curl the lip at you, for I would turn from it. This I have done. Those who have shrunk from me because of this, have shrunk from you, and proved you so far right. Such power and patronage: such relatives of influence and rank: as smiled upon me then, look coldly now; but there are smiling fields and waving trees in England’s richest county; and by one village church—mine, Rose, my own!—there stands a rustic

dwelling which you can make me prouder of, than all the hopes I have renounced, measured a thousandfold. This is my rank and station now, and here I lay it down!'

'It's a trying thing waiting supper for lovers,' said Mr. Grimwig, waking up, and pulling his pocket-handkerchief from over his head.

Truth to tell, the supper had been waiting a most unreasonable time. Neither Mrs. Maylie, nor Harry, nor Rose (who all came in together), could offer a word in extenuation.

'I had serious thoughts of eating my head to-night,' said Mr. Grimwig, 'for I began to think I should get nothing else. I'll take the liberty, if you'll allow me, of saluting the bride that is to be.'

Mr. Grimwig lost no time in carrying this notice into effect upon the blushing girl; and the example, being contagious, was followed both by the doctor and Mr. Brownlow: some people affirm that Harry Maylie had been observed to set it, originally, in a dark room adjoining; but the best authorities consider this downright scandal: he being young and a clergyman.

'Oliver, my child,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'where have you been, and why do you look so sad? There are tears stealing down your face at this moment. What is the matter?'

It is a world of disappointment: often to the hopes we most cherish, and hopes that do our nature the greatest honour.

Poor Dick was dead!

CHAPTER LII

THE COURT WAS PAVED, from floor to roof, with human faces. Inquisitive and eager eyes peered from every inch of space. From the rail before the dock, away into the sharpest angle of the smallest corner in the galleries, all looks were fixed upon one man—Fagin. Before him and behind: above, below, on the right and on the left: he seemed to stand surrounded by a firmament, all bright with gleaming eyes.

He stood there, in all this glare of living light, with one hand resting on the wooden slab before him, the other held to his ear, and his head thrust forward to enable him to catch with greater distinctness every word that fell from the presiding judge, who was delivering his charge to the jury. At times, he turned his eyes sharply upon them to observe the effect of the slightest featherweight in his favour; and when the points against him were stated with terrible distinctness, looked towards his counsel, in mute appeal that he would, even then, urge something in his behalf. Beyond these manifestations of anxiety, he stirred not hand or foot. He had scarcely moved since the trial began; and now that the judge ceased to speak, he still remained in the same strained attitude of close attention, with his gaze bent on him, as though he listened still.

A slight bustle in the court, recalled him to himself. Looking round, he saw that the juryman had turned together, to consider their verdict. As his eyes wandered to the gallery, he could see the people rising above each other to see his face: some hastily applying their glasses to their eyes: and others whispering their neighbours with looks expressive of abhorrence. A few there were, who seemed unmindful of him, and looked only to the jury, in impatient wonder how they could delay. But in no one face—not even among the women, of whom there were many there—could he read the faintest sympathy with himself, or any feeling but one of all-absorbing

interest that he should be condemned.

As he saw all this in one bewildered glance, the deathlike stillness came again, and looking back he saw that the jurymen had turned towards the judge. Hush!

They only sought permission to retire.

He looked, wistfully, into their faces, one by one when they passed out, as though to see which way the greater number leant; but that was fruitless. The jailer touched him on the shoulder. He followed mechanically to the end of the dock, and sat down on a chair. The man pointed it out, or he would not have seen it.

He looked up into the gallery again. Some of the people were eating, and some fanning themselves with handkerchiefs; for the crowded place was very hot. There was one young man sketching his face in a little note-book. He wondered whether it was like, and looked on when the artist broke his pencil-point, and made another with his knife, as any idle spectator might have done.

In the same way, when he turned his eyes towards the judge, his mind began to busy itself with the fashion of his dress, and what it cost, and how he put it on. There was an old fat gentleman on the bench, too, who had gone out, some half an hour before, and now come back. He wondered within himself whether this man had been to get his dinner, what he had had, and where he had had it; and pursued this train of careless thought until some new object caught his eye and roused another.

Not that, all this time, his mind was, for an instant, free from one oppressive overwhelming sense of the grave that opened at his feet; it was ever present to him, but in a vague and general way, and he could not fix his thoughts upon it. Thus, even while he trembled, and turned burning hot at the idea of speedy death, he fell to counting the iron spikes before him, and wondering how the head of one had been broken off, and whether they would mend it, or leave it as it was. Then, he thought of all the horrors of the gallows and the scaffold—and stopped to watch a man sprinkling the floor to cool it—and then went on to think again.

At length there was a cry of silence, and a breathless look from all towards the door. The jury returned, and passed him close. He could glean nothing from their faces; they might as well have been of stone. Perfect stillness ensued—not a rustle—not a breath—Guilty.

The building rang with a tremendous shout, and another, and another, and then it echoed loud groans, that gathered strength as they swelled out, like angry thunder. It was a peal of joy from the populace outside, greeting the news that he would die on Monday.

The noise subsided, and he was asked if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him. He had resumed his listening attitude, and looked intently at his questioner while the demand was made; but it was twice repeated before he seemed to hear it, and then he only muttered that he was an old man—an old man—and so, dropping into a whisper, was silent again.

The judge assumed the black cap, and the prisoner still stood with the same air and gesture. A woman in the gallery, uttered some exclamation, called forth by this dread solemnity; he looked hastily up as if angry at the interruption, and bent forward yet more attentively. The address was solemn and impressive; the sentence fearful to hear. But he stood, like a marble figure, without the motion of a nerve. His haggard face was still thrust forward, his under-jaw hanging down, and his eyes staring out before him, when the jailer put his hand upon his arm, and beckoned him away. He gazed stupidly about him for an instant, and obeyed.

They led him through a paved room under the court, where some prisoners were waiting till their turns came, and others were talking to their friends, who crowded round a grate which looked into the open yard. There was nobody there to speak to *him*; but, as he passed, the prisoners fell back to render him more visible to the people who were clinging to the bars: and they assailed him with opprobrious names, and screeched and hissed. He shook his fist, and would have spat upon them; but his conductors hurried him on, through a gloomy passage lighted by a few dim lamps, into the interior of the prison.

Here, he was searched, that he might not have about him the means of anticipating the law; this ceremony performed, they led him to one of the condemned cells, and left him there—alone.

He sat down on a stone bench opposite the door, which served for seat and bedstead; and casting his blood-shot eyes upon the ground, tried to collect his thoughts. After awhile, he began to remember a few disjointed fragments of what the judge had said: though it had seemed to him, at the time, that he could not hear a word. These gradually fell into their proper

places, and by degrees suggested more: so that in a little time he had the whole, almost as it was delivered. To be hanged by the neck, till he was dead—that was the end. To be hanged by the neck till he was dead.

As it came on very dark, he began to think of all the men he had known who had died upon the scaffold; some of them through his means. They rose up, in such quick succession, that he could hardly count them. He had seen some of them die,—and had joked too, because they died with prayers upon their lips. With what a rattling noise the drop went down; and how suddenly they changed, from strong and vigorous men to dangling heaps of clothes!

Some of them might have inhabited that very cell—sat upon that very spot. It was very dark; why didn't they bring a light? The cell had been built for many years. Scores of men must have passed their last hours there. It was like sitting in a vault strewn with dead bodies—the cap, the noose, the pinioned arms, the faces that he knew, even beneath that hideous veil.—Light, light!

At length, when his hands were raw with beating against the heavy door and walls, two men appeared: one bearing a candle, which he thrust into an iron candlestick fixed against the wall: the other dragging in a mattress on which to pass the night; for the prisoner was to be left alone no more.

Then came the night—dark, dismal, silent night. Other watchers are glad to hear this church-clock strike, for they tell of life and coming day. To him they brought despair. The boom of every iron bell came laden with the one, deep, hollow sound—Death. What availed the noise and bustle of cheerful morning, which penetrated even there, to him? It was another form of knell, with mockery added to the warning.

The day passed off. Day? There was no day; it was gone as soon as come—and night came on again; night so long, and yet so short; long in its dreadful silence, and short in its fleeting hours. At one time he raved and blasphemed; and at another howled and tore his hair. Venerable men of his own persuasion had come to pray beside him, but he had driven them away with curses. They renewed their charitable efforts, and he beat them off.

Saturday night. He had only one night more to live. And as he thought of this, the day broke—Sunday.

It was not until the night of this last awful day, that a withering sense of his helpless, desperate state came in its full intensity upon his blighted soul;

not that he had ever held any defined or positive hope of mercy, but that he had never been able to consider more than the dim probability of dying so soon. He had spoken little to either of the two men, who relieved each other in their attendance upon him; and they, for their parts, made no effort to rouse his attention. He had sat there, awake, but dreaming. Now, he started up, every minute, and with gasping mouth and burning skin, hurried to and fro, in such a paroxysm of fear and wrath that even they—used to such sights—recoiled from him with horror. He grew so terrible, at last, in all the tortures of his evil conscience, that one man could not bear to sit there, eyeing him alone; and so the two kept watch together.

He cowered down upon his stone bed, and thought of the past. He had been wounded with some missiles from the crowd on the day of his capture, and his head was bandaged with a linen cloth. His red hair hung down upon his bloodless face; his beard was torn, and twisted into knots; his eyes shone with a terrible light; his unwashed flesh crackled with the fever that burnt him up. Eight—nine—then. If it was not a trick to frighten him, and those were the real hours treading on each other's heels, where would he be, when they came round again! Eleven! Another struck, before the voice of the previous hour had ceased to vibrate. At eight, he would be the only mourner in his own funeral train; at eleven—

Those dreadful walls of Newgate, which have hidden so much misery and such unspeakable anguish, not only from the eyes, but, too often, and too long, from the thoughts, of men, never held so dread a spectacle as that. The few who lingered as they passed, and wondered what the man was doing who was to be hanged to-morrow, would have slept but ill that night, if they could have seen him.

From early in the evening until nearly midnight, little groups of two and three presented themselves at the lodge-gate, and inquired, with anxious faces, whether any reprieve had been received. These being answered in the negative, communicated the welcome intelligence to clusters in the street, who pointed out to one another the door from which he must come out, and showed where the scaffold would be built, and, walking with unwilling steps away, turned back to conjure up the scene. By degrees they fell off, one by one; and, for an hour, in the dead of night, the street was left to solitude and darkness.

The space before the prison was cleared, and a few strong barriers,

painted black, had been already thrown across the road to break the pressure of the expected crowd, when Mr. Brownlow and Oliver appeared at the wicket, and presented an order of admission to the prisoner, signed by one of the sheriffs. They were immediately admitted into the lodge.

‘Is the young gentleman to come too, sir?’ said the man whose duty it was to conduct them. ‘It’s not a sight for children, sir.’

‘It is not indeed, my friend,’ rejoined Mr. Brownlow; ‘but my business with this man is intimately connected with him; and as this child has seen him in the full career of his success and villainy, I think it as well—even at the cost of some pain and fear—that he should see him now.’

These few words had been said apart, so as to be inaudible to Oliver. The man touched his hat; and glancing at Oliver with some curiousity, opened another gate, opposite to that by which they had entered, and led them on, through dark and winding ways, towards the cells.

‘This,’ said the man, stopping in a gloomy passage where a couple of workmen were making some preparations in profound silence—‘this is the place he passes through. If you step this way, you can see the door he goes out at.’

He led them into a stone kitchen, fitted with coppers for dressing the prison food, and pointed to a door. There was an open grating above it, through which came the sound of men’s voices, mingled with the noise of hammering, and the throwing down of boards. There were putting up the scaffold.

From this place, they passed through several strong gates, opened by other turnkeys from the inner side; and, having entered an open yard, ascended a flight of narrow steps, and came into a passage with a row of strong doors on the left hand. Motioning them to remain where they were, the turnkey knocked at one of these with his bunch of keys. The two attendants, after a little whispering, came out into the passage, stretching themselves as if glad of the temporary relief, and motioned the visitors to follow the jailer into the cell. They did so.

The condemned criminal was seated on his bed, rocking himself from side to side, with a countenance more like that of a snared beast than the face of a man. His mind was evidently wandering to his old life, for he continued to mutter, without appearing conscious of their presence otherwise than as a part of his vision.

‘Good boy, Charley—well done—’ he mumbled. ‘Oliver, too, ha! ha! ha! Oliver too—quite the gentleman now—quite the—take that boy away to bed!’

The jailer took the disengaged hand of Oliver; and, whispering him not to be alarmed, looked on without speaking.

‘Take him away to bed!’ cried Fagin. ‘Do you hear me, some of you? He has been the—the—somehow the cause of all this. It’s worth the money to bring him up to it—Bolter’s throat, Bill; never mind the girl—Bolter’s throat as deep as you can cut. Saw his head off!’

‘Fagin,’ said the jailer.

‘That’s me!’ cried the Jew, falling instantly, into the attitude of listening he had assumed upon his trial. ‘An old man, my Lord; a very old, old man!’

‘Here,’ said the turnkey, laying his hand upon his breast to keep him down. ‘Here’s somebody wants to see you, to ask you some questions, I suppose. Fagin, Fagin! Are you a man?’

‘I shan’t be one long,’ he replied, looking up with a face retaining no human expression but rage and terror. ‘Strike them all dead! What right have they to butcher me?’

As he spoke he caught sight of Oliver and Mr. Brownlow. Shrinking to the furthest corner of the seat, he demanded to know what they wanted there.

‘Steady,’ said the turnkey, still holding him down. ‘Now, sir, tell him what you want. Quick, if you please, for he grows worse as the time gets on.’

‘You have some papers,’ said Mr. Brownlow advancing, ‘which were placed in your hands, for better security, by a man called Monks.’

‘It’s all a lie together,’ replied Fagin. ‘I haven’t one—not one.’

‘For the love of God,’ said Mr. Brownlow solemnly, ‘do not say that now, upon the very verge of death; but tell me where they are. You know that Sikes is dead; that Monks has confessed; that there is no hope of any further gain. Where are those papers?’

‘Oliver,’ cried Fagin, beckoning to him. ‘Here, here! Let me whisper to you.’

‘I am not afraid,’ said Oliver in a low voice, as he relinquished Mr. Brownlow’s hand.

‘The papers,’ said Fagin, drawing Oliver towards him, ‘are in a canvas

bag, in a hole a little way up the chimney in the top front-room. I want to talk to you, my dear. I want to talk to you.’

‘Yes, yes,’ returned Oliver. ‘Let me say a prayer. Do! Let me say one prayer. Say only one, upon your knees, with me, and we will talk till morning.’

‘Outside, outside,’ replied Fagin, pushing the boy before him towards the door, and looking vacantly over his head. ‘Say I’ve gone to sleep—they’ll believe you. You can get me out, if you take me so. Now then, now then!’

‘Oh! God forgive this wretched man!’ cried the boy with a burst of tears.

‘That’s right, that’s right,’ said Fagin. ‘That’ll help us on. This door first. If I shake and tremble, as we pass the gallows, don’t you mind, but hurry on. Now, now, now!’

‘Have you nothing else to ask him, sir?’ inquired the turnkey.

‘No other question,’ replied Mr. Brownlow. ‘If I hoped we could recall him to a sense of his position—’

‘Nothing will do that, sir,’ replied the man, shaking his head. ‘You had better leave him.’

The door of the cell opened, and the attendants returned.

‘Press on, press on,’ cried Fagin. ‘Softly, but not so slow. Faster, faster!’

The men laid hands upon him, and disengaging Oliver from his grasp, held him back. He struggled with the power of desperation, for an instant; and then sent up cry upon cry that penetrated even those massive walls, and rang in their ears until they reached the open yard.

It was some time before they left the prison. Oliver nearly swooned after this frightful scene, and was so weak that for an hour or more, he had not the strength to walk.

Day was dawning when they again emerged. A great multitude had already assembled; the windows were filled with people, smoking and playing cards to beguile the time; the crowd were pushing, quarrelling, joking. Everything told of life and animation, but one dark cluster of objects in the centre of all—the black stage, the cross-beam, the rope, and all the hideous apparatus of death.

CHAPTER LIII

THE FORTUNES OF THOSE who have figured in this tale are nearly closed. The little that remains to their historian to relate, is told in few and simple words.

Before three months had passed, Rose Fleming and Harry Maylie were married in the village church which was henceforth to be the scene of the young clergyman's labours; on the same day they entered into possession of their new and happy home.

Mrs. Maylie took up her abode with her son and daughter-in-law, to enjoy, during the tranquil remainder of her days, the greatest felicity that age and worth can know—the contemplation of the happiness of those on whom the warmest affections and tenderest cares of a well-spent life, have been unceasingly bestowed.

It appeared, on full and careful investigation, that if the wreck of property remaining in the custody of Monks (which had never prospered either in his hands or in those of his mother) were equally divided between himself and Oliver, it would yield, to each, little more than three thousand pounds. By the provisions of his father's will, Oliver would have been entitled to the whole; but Mr. Brownlow, unwilling to deprive the elder son of the opportunity of retrieving his former vices and pursuing an honest career, proposed this mode of distribution, to which his young charge joyfully acceded.

Monks, still bearing that assumed name, retired with his portion to a distant part of the New World; where, having quickly squandered it, he once more fell into his old courses, and, after undergoing a long confinement for some fresh act of fraud and knavery, at length sunk under an attack of his old disorder, and died in prison. As far from home, died the chief remaining members of his friend Fagin's gang.

Mr. Brownlow adopted Oliver as his son. Removing with him and the old housekeeper to within a mile of the parsonage-house, where his dear friends resided, he gratified the only remaining wish of Oliver’s warm and earnest heart, and thus linked together a little society, whose condition approached as nearly to one of perfect happiness as can ever be known in this changing world.

Soon after the marriage of the young people, the worthy doctor returned to Chertsey, where, bereft of the presence of his old friends, he would have been discontented if his temperament had admitted of such a feeling; and would have turned quite peevish if he had known how. For two or three months, he contented himself with hinting that he feared the air began to disagree with him; then, finding that the place really no longer was, to him, what it had been, he settled his business on his assistant, took a bachelor’s cottage outside the village of which his young friend was pastor, and instantaneously recovered. Here he took to gardening, planting, fishing, carpentering, and various other pursuits of a similar kind: all undertaken with his characteristic impetuosity. In each and all he has since become famous throughout the neighborhood, as a most profound authority.

Before his removal, he had managed to contract a strong friendship for Mr. Grimwig, which that eccentric gentleman cordially reciprocated. He is accordingly visited by Mr. Grimwig a great many times in the course of the year. On all such occasions, Mr. Grimwig plants, fishes, and carpenters, with great ardour; doing everything in a very singular and unprecedented manner, but always maintaining with his favourite asseveration, that his mode is the right one. On Sundays, he never fails to criticise the sermon to the young clergyman’s face: always informing Mr. Losberne, in strict confidence afterwards, that he considers it an excellent performance, but deems it as well not to say so. It is a standing and very favourite joke, for Mr. Brownlow to rally him on his old prophecy concerning Oliver, and to remind him of the night on which they sat with the watch between them, waiting his return; but Mr. Grimwig contends that he was right in the main, and, in proof thereof, remarks that Oliver did not come back after all; which always calls forth a laugh on his side, and increases his good humour.

Mr. Noah Claypole: receiving a free pardon from the Crown in consequence of being admitted approver against Fagin: and considering his profession not altogether as safe a one as he could wish: was, for some little

time, at a loss for the means of a livelihood, not burdened with too much work. After some consideration, he went into business as an Informer, in which calling he realises a genteel subsistence. His plan is, to walk out once a week during church time attended by Charlotte in respectable attire. The lady faints away at the doors of charitable publicans, and the gentleman being accommodated with three-penny worth of brandy to restore her, lays an information next day, and pockets half the penalty. Sometimes Mr. Claypole faints himself, but the result is the same.

Mr. and Mrs. Bumble, deprived of their situations, were gradually reduced to great indigence and misery, and finally became paupers in that very same workhouse in which they had once lorded it over others. Mr. Bumble has been heard to say, that in this reverse and degradation, he has not even spirits to be thankful for being separated from his wife.

As to Mr. Giles and Brittles, they still remain in their old posts, although the former is bald, and the last-named boy quite grey. They sleep at the parsonage, but divide their attentions so equally among its inmates, and Oliver and Mr. Brownlow, and Mr. Losberne, that to this day the villagers have never been able to discover to which establishment they properly belong.

Master Charles Bates, appalled by Sikes's crime, fell into a train of reflection whether an honest life was not, after all, the best. Arriving at the conclusion that it certainly was, he turned his back upon the scenes of the past, resolved to amend it in some new sphere of action. He struggled hard, and suffered much, for some time; but, having a contented disposition, and a good purpose, succeeded in the end; and, from being a farmer's drudge, and a carrier's lad, he is now the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire.

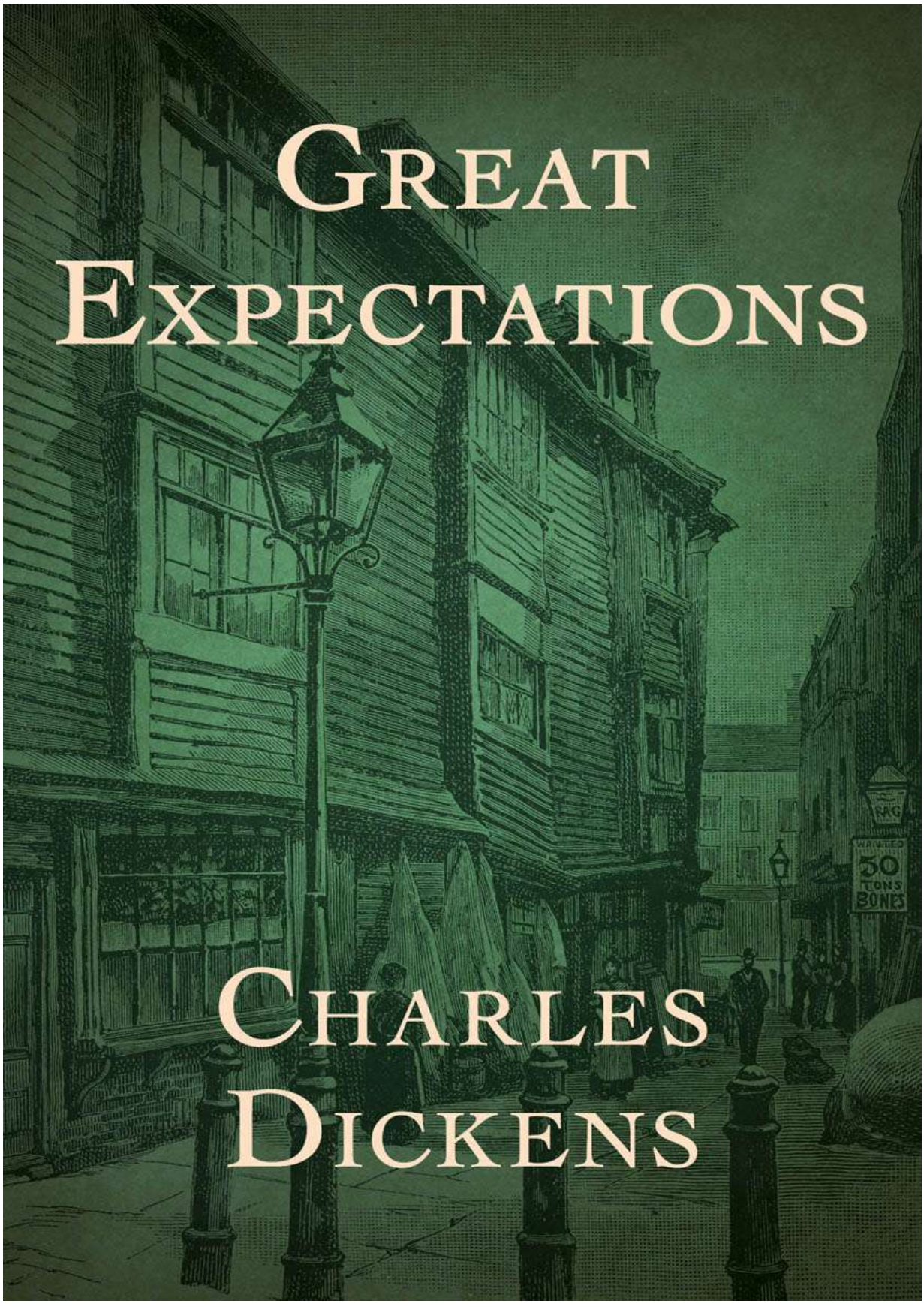
And now, the hand that traces these words, falters, as it approaches the conclusion of its task; and would weave, for a little longer space, the thread of these adventures.

I would fain linger yet with a few of those among whom I have so long moved, and share their happiness by endeavouring to depict it. I would show Rose Maylie in all the bloom and grace of early womanhood, shedding on her secluded path in life soft and gentle light, that fell on all who trod it with her, and shone into their hearts. I would paint her the life and joy of the fire-side circle and the lively summer group; I would follow

her through the sultry fields at noon, and hear the low tones of her sweet voice in the moonlit evening walk; I would watch her in all her goodness and charity abroad, and the smiling untiring discharge of domestic duties at home; I would paint her and her dead sister's child happy in their love for one another, and passing whole hours together in picturing the friends whom they had so sadly lost; I would summon before me, once again, those joyous little faces that clustered round her knee, and listen to their merry prattle; I would recall the tones of that clear laugh, and conjure up the sympathising tear that glistened in the soft blue eye. These, and a thousand looks and smiles, and turns of thought and speech—I would fain recall them every one.

How Mr. Brownlow went on, from day to day, filling the mind of his adopted child with stores of knowledge, and becoming attached to him, more and more, as his nature developed itself, and showed the thriving seeds of all he wished him to become—how he traced in him new traits of his early friend, that awakened in his own bosom old remembrances, melancholy and yet sweet and soothing—how the two orphans, tried by adversity, remembered its lessons in mercy to others, and mutual love, and fervent thanks to Him who had protected and preserved them—these are all matters which need not to be told. I have said that they were truly happy; and without strong affection and humanity of heart, and gratitude to that Being whose code is Mercy, and whose great attribute is Benevolence to all things that breathe, happiness can never be attained.

Within the altar of the old village church there stands a white marble tablet, which bears as yet but one word: 'AGNES.' There is no coffin in that tomb; and may it be many, many years, before another name is placed above it! But, if the spirits of the Dead ever come back to earth, to visit spots hallowed by the love—the love beyond the grave—of those whom they knew in life, I believe that the shade of Agnes sometimes hovers round that solemn nook. I believe it none the less because that nook is in a Church, and she was weak and erring.



Great Expectations

Charles Dickens

Great Expectations

Chapter I

MY FATHER'S FAMILY NAME being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his tombstone and my sister,—Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, "Also Georgiana Wife of the Above," I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine,—who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle,—I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence.

Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark

flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dikes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.

“Hold your noise!” cried a terrible voice, as a man started up from among the graves at the side of the church porch. “Keep still, you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat!”

A fearful man, all in coarse gray, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped, and shivered, and glared, and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.

“Oh! Don’t cut my throat, sir,” I pleaded in terror. “Pray don’t do it, sir.”

“Tell us your name!” said the man. “Quick!”

“Pip, sir.”

“Once more,” said the man, staring at me. “Give it mouth!”

“Pip. Pip, sir.”

“Show us where you live,” said the man. “Pint out the place!”

I pointed to where our village lay, on the flat in-shore among the alder-trees and pollards, a mile or more from the church.

The man, after looking at me for a moment, turned me upside down, and emptied my pockets. There was nothing in them but a piece of bread. When the church came to itself,—for he was so sudden and strong that he made it go head over heels before me, and I saw the steeple under my feet,—when the church came to itself, I say, I was seated on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread ravenously.

“You young dog,” said the man, licking his lips, “what fat cheeks you ha’ got.”

I believe they were fat, though I was at that time undersized for my years, and not strong.

“Darn me if I couldn’t eat em,” said the man, with a threatening shake of his head, “and if I han’t half a mind to’t!”

I earnestly expressed my hope that he wouldn’t, and held tighter to the tombstone on which he had put me; partly, to keep myself upon it; partly, to

keep myself from crying.

"Now lookee here!" said the man. "Where's your mother?"

"There, sir!" said I.

He started, made a short run, and stopped and looked over his shoulder.

"There, sir!" I timidly explained. "Also Georgiana. That's my mother."

"Oh!" said he, coming back. "And is that your father alonger your mother?"

"Yes, sir," said I; "him too; late of this parish."

"Ha!" he muttered then, considering. "Who d'ye live with,—supposin' you're kindly let to live, which I han't made up my mind about?"

"My sister, sir,—Mrs. Joe Gargery,—wife of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, sir."

"Blacksmith, eh?" said he. And looked down at his leg.

After darkly looking at his leg and me several times, he came closer to my tombstone, took me by both arms, and tilted me back as far as he could hold me; so that his eyes looked most powerfully down into mine, and mine looked most helplessly up into his.

"Now lookee here," he said, "the question being whether you're to be let to live. You know what a file is?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know what wittles is?"

"Yes, sir."

After each question he tilted me over a little more, so as to give me a greater sense of helplessness and danger.

"You get me a file." He tilted me again. "And you get me wittles." He tilted me again. "You bring 'em both to me." He tilted me again. "Or I'll have your heart and liver out." He tilted me again.

I was dreadfully frightened, and so giddy that I clung to him with both hands, and said, "If you would kindly please to let me keep upright, sir, perhaps I shouldn't be sick, and perhaps I could attend more."

He gave me a most tremendous dip and roll, so that the church jumped over its own weathercock. Then, he held me by the arms, in an upright position on the top of the stone, and went on in these fearful terms:—

"You bring me, to-morrow morning early, that file and them wittles. You bring the lot to me, at that old Battery over yonder. You do it, and you never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning your having seen such

a person as me, or any person sumever, and you shall be let to live. You fail, or you go from my words in any partickler, no matter how small it is, and your heart and your liver shall be tore out, roasted, and ate. Now, I ain't alone, as you may think I am. There's a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am a Angel. That young man hears the words I speak. That young man has a secret way pecooliar to himself, of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. It is in wain for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open. I am a keeping that young man from harming of you at the present moment, with great difficulty. I find it wery hard to hold that young man off of your inside. Now, what do you say?"

I said that I would get him the file, and I would get him what broken bits of food I could, and I would come to him at the Battery, early in the morning.

"Say Lord strike you dead if you don't!" said the man.

I said so, and he took me down.

"Now," he pursued, "you remember what you've undertook, and you remember that young man, and you get home!"

"Goo-good night, sir," I faltered.

"Much of that!" said he, glancing about him over the cold wet flat. "I wish I was a frog. Or a eel!"

At the same time, he hugged his shuddering body in both his arms,—clasping himself, as if to hold himself together,—and limped towards the low church wall. As I saw him go, picking his way among the nettles, and among the brambles that bound the green mounds, he looked in my young eyes as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in.

When he came to the low church wall, he got over it, like a man whose legs were numbed and stiff, and then turned round to look for me. When I saw him turning, I set my face towards home, and made the best use of my legs. But presently I looked over my shoulder, and saw him going on again towards the river, still hugging himself in both arms, and picking his way with his sore feet among the great stones dropped into the marshes here and

there, for stepping-places when the rains were heavy or the tide was in.

The marshes were just a long black horizontal line then, as I stopped to look after him; and the river was just another horizontal line, not nearly so broad nor yet so black; and the sky was just a row of long angry red lines and dense black lines intermixed. On the edge of the river I could faintly make out the only two black things in all the prospect that seemed to be standing upright; one of these was the beacon by which the sailors steered, —like an unhooped cask upon a pole,—an ugly thing when you were near it; the other, a gibbet, with some chains hanging to it which had once held a pirate. The man was limping on towards this latter, as if he were the pirate come to life, and come down, and going back to hook himself up again. It gave me a terrible turn when I thought so; and as I saw the cattle lifting their heads to gaze after him, I wondered whether they thought so too. I looked all round for the horrible young man, and could see no signs of him. But now I was frightened again, and ran home without stopping.

Chapter II

MY SISTER, MRS. JOE Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbors because she had brought me up “by hand.” Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand.

She was not a good-looking woman, my sister; and I had a general impression that she must have made Joe Gargery marry her by hand. Joe was a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue that they seemed to have somehow got mixed with their own whites. He was a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow,—a sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness.

My sister, Mrs. Joe, with black hair and eyes, had such a prevailing redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap. She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles. She made it a powerful merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe, that she wore this apron so much. Though I really see no reason why she should have worn it at all; or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off, every day of her life.

Joe’s forge adjoined our house, which was a wooden house, as many of the dwellings in our country were,—most of them, at that time. When I ran home from the churchyard, the forge was shut up, and Joe was sitting alone in the kitchen. Joe and I being fellow-sufferers, and having confidences as such, Joe imparted a confidence to me, the moment I raised the latch of the

door and peeped in at him opposite to it, sitting in the chimney corner.

“Mrs. Joe has been out a dozen times, looking for you, Pip. And she’s out now, making it a baker’s dozen.”

“Is she?”

“Yes, Pip,” said Joe; “and what’s worse, she’s got Tickler with her.”

At this dismal intelligence, I twisted the only button on my waistcoat round and round, and looked in great depression at the fire. Tickler was a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my tickled frame.

“She sot down,” said Joe, “and she got up, and she made a grab at Tickler, and she Ram-paged out. That’s what she did,” said Joe, slowly clearing the fire between the lower bars with the poker, and looking at it; “she Ram-paged out, Pip.”

“Has she been gone long, Joe?” I always treated him as a larger species of child, and as no more than my equal.

“Well,” said Joe, glancing up at the Dutch clock, “she’s been on the Ram-page, this last spell, about five minutes, Pip. She’s a coming! Get behind the door, old chap, and have the jack-towel betwixt you.”

I took the advice. My sister, Mrs. Joe, throwing the door wide open, and finding an obstruction behind it, immediately divined the cause, and applied Tickler to its further investigation. She concluded by throwing me—I often served as a connubial missile—at Joe, who, glad to get hold of me on any terms, passed me on into the chimney and quietly fenced me up there with his great leg.

“Where have you been, you young monkey?” said Mrs. Joe, stamping her foot. “Tell me directly what you’ve been doing to wear me away with fret and fright and worrit, or I’d have you out of that corner if you was fifty Pips, and he was five hundred Gargerys.”

“I have only been to the churchyard,” said I, from my stool, crying and rubbing myself.

“Churchyard!” repeated my sister. “If it warn’t for me you’d have been to the churchyard long ago, and stayed there. Who brought you up by hand?”

“You did,” said I.

“And why did I do it, I should like to know?” exclaimed my sister.

I whimpered, “I don’t know.”

“I don’t!” said my sister. “I’d never do it again! I know that. I may truly

say I’ve never had this apron of mine off since born you were. It’s bad enough to be a blacksmith’s wife (and him a Gargery) without being your mother.”

My thoughts strayed from that question as I looked disconsolately at the fire. For the fugitive out on the marshes with the ironed leg, the mysterious young man, the file, the food, and the dreadful pledge I was under to commit a larceny on those sheltering premises, rose before me in the avenging coals.

“Hah!” said Mrs. Joe, restoring Tickler to his station. “Churchyard, indeed! You may well say churchyard, you two.” One of us, by the by, had not said it at all. “You’ll drive me to the churchyard betwixt you, one of these days, and O, a pr-r-recious pair you’d be without me!”

As she applied herself to set the tea-things, Joe peeped down at me over his leg, as if he were mentally casting me and himself up, and calculating what kind of pair we practically should make, under the grievous circumstances foreshadowed. After that, he sat feeling his right-side flaxen curls and whisker, and following Mrs. Joe about with his blue eyes, as his manner always was at squally times.

My sister had a trenchant way of cutting our bread and butter for us, that never varied. First, with her left hand she jammed the loaf hard and fast against her bib,—where it sometimes got a pin into it, and sometimes a needle, which we afterwards got into our mouths. Then she took some butter (not too much) on a knife and spread it on the loaf, in an apothecary kind of way, as if she were making a plaster,—using both sides of the knife with a slapping dexterity, and trimming and moulding the butter off round the crust. Then, she gave the knife a final smart wipe on the edge of the plaster, and then sawed a very thick round off the loaf: which she finally, before separating from the loaf, hewed into two halves, of which Joe got one, and I the other.

On the present occasion, though I was hungry, I dared not eat my slice. I felt that I must have something in reserve for my dreadful acquaintance, and his ally the still more dreadful young man. I knew Mrs. Joe’s housekeeping to be of the strictest kind, and that my larcenous researches might find nothing available in the safe. Therefore I resolved to put my hunk of bread and butter down the leg of my trousers.

The effort of resolution necessary to the achievement of this purpose I

found to be quite awful. It was as if I had to make up my mind to leap from the top of a high house, or plunge into a great depth of water. And it was made the more difficult by the unconscious Joe. In our already-mentioned freemasonry as fellow-sufferers, and in his good-natured companionship with me, it was our evening habit to compare the way we bit through our slices, by silently holding them up to each other's admiration now and then, —which stimulated us to new exertions. To-night, Joe several times invited me, by the display of his fast diminishing slice, to enter upon our usual friendly competition; but he found me, each time, with my yellow mug of tea on one knee, and my untouched bread and butter on the other. At last, I desperately considered that the thing I contemplated must be done, and that it had best be done in the least improbable manner consistent with the circumstances. I took advantage of a moment when Joe had just looked at me, and got my bread and butter down my leg.

Joe was evidently made uncomfortable by what he supposed to be my loss of appetite, and took a thoughtful bite out of his slice, which he didn't seem to enjoy. He turned it about in his mouth much longer than usual, pondering over it a good deal, and after all gulped it down like a pill. He was about to take another bite, and had just got his head on one side for a good purchase on it, when his eye fell on me, and he saw that my bread and butter was gone.

The wonder and consternation with which Joe stopped on the threshold of his bite and stared at me, were too evident to escape my sister's observation.

"What's the matter now?" said she, smartly, as she put down her cup.

"I say, you know!" muttered Joe, shaking his head at me in very serious remonstrance. "Pip, old chap! You'll do yourself a mischief. It'll stick somewhere. You can't have chawed it, Pip."

"What's the matter now?" repeated my sister, more sharply than before.

"If you can cough any trifle on it up, Pip, I'd recommend you to do it," said Joe, all aghast. "Manners is manners, but still your elth's your elth."

By this time, my sister was quite desperate, so she pounced on Joe, and, taking him by the two whiskers, knocked his head for a little while against the wall behind him, while I sat in the corner, looking guiltily on.

"Now, perhaps you'll mention what's the matter," said my sister, out of breath, "you staring great stuck pig."

Joe looked at her in a helpless way, then took a helpless bite, and looked at me again.

"You know, Pip," said Joe, solemnly, with his last bite in his cheek, and speaking in a confidential voice, as if we two were quite alone, "you and me is always friends, and I'd be the last to tell upon you, any time. But such a—" he moved his chair and looked about the floor between us, and then again at me—"such a most oncommon Bolt as that!"

"Been bolting his food, has he?" cried my sister.

"You know, old chap," said Joe, looking at me, and not at Mrs. Joe, with his bite still in his cheek, "I Bolted, myself, when I was your age—frequent—and as a boy I've been among a many Bolters; but I never see your Bolting equal yet, Pip, and it's a mercy you ain't Bolted dead."

My sister made a dive at me, and fished me up by the hair, saying nothing more than the awful words, "You come along and be dosed."

Some medical beast had revived Tar-water in those days as a fine medicine, and Mrs. Joe always kept a supply of it in the cupboard; having a belief in its virtues correspondent to its nastiness. At the best of times, so much of this elixir was administered to me as a choice restorative, that I was conscious of going about, smelling like a new fence. On this particular evening the urgency of my case demanded a pint of this mixture, which was poured down my throat, for my greater comfort, while Mrs. Joe held my head under her arm, as a boot would be held in a bootjack. Joe got off with half a pint; but was made to swallow that (much to his disturbance, as he sat slowly munching and meditating before the fire), "because he had had a turn." Judging from myself, I should say he certainly had a turn afterwards, if he had had none before.

Conscience is a dreadful thing when it accuses man or boy; but when, in the case of a boy, that secret burden co-operates with another secret burden down the leg of his trousers, it is (as I can testify) a great punishment. The guilty knowledge that I was going to rob Mrs. Joe—I never thought I was going to rob Joe, for I never thought of any of the housekeeping property as his—united to the necessity of always keeping one hand on my bread and butter as I sat, or when I was ordered about the kitchen on any small errand, almost drove me out of my mind. Then, as the marsh winds made the fire glow and flare, I thought I heard the voice outside, of the man with the iron on his leg who had sworn me to secrecy, declaring that he couldn't and

wouldn’t starve until to-morrow, but must be fed now. At other times, I thought, What if the young man who was with so much difficulty restrained from imbruing his hands in me should yield to a constitutional impatience, or should mistake the time, and should think himself accredited to my heart and liver to-night, instead of to-morrow! If ever anybody’s hair stood on end with terror, mine must have done so then. But, perhaps, nobody’s ever did?

It was Christmas Eve, and I had to stir the pudding for next day, with a copper-stick, from seven to eight by the Dutch clock. I tried it with the load upon my leg (and that made me think afresh of the man with the load on *his* leg), and found the tendency of exercise to bring the bread and butter out at my ankle, quite unmanageable. Happily I slipped away, and deposited that part of my conscience in my garret bedroom.

“Hark!” said I, when I had done my stirring, and was taking a final warm in the chimney corner before being sent up to bed; “was that great guns, Joe?”

“Ah!” said Joe. “There’s another conwict off.”

“What does that mean, Joe?” said I.

Mrs. Joe, who always took explanations upon herself, said, snappishly, “Escaped. Escaped.” Administering the definition like Tar-water.

While Mrs. Joe sat with her head bending over her needlework, I put my mouth into the forms of saying to Joe, “What’s a convict?” Joe put his mouth into the forms of returning such a highly elaborate answer, that I could make out nothing of it but the single word “Pip.”

“There was a conwict off last night,” said Joe, aloud, “after sunset-gun. And they fired warning of him. And now it appears they’re firing warning of another.”

“Who’s firing?” said I.

“Drat that boy,” interposed my sister, frowning at me over her work, “what a questioner he is. Ask no questions, and you’ll be told no lies.”

It was not very polite to herself, I thought, to imply that I should be told lies by her even if I did ask questions. But she never was polite unless there was company.

At this point Joe greatly augmented my curiosity by taking the utmost pains to open his mouth very wide, and to put it into the form of a word that looked to me like “sulks.” Therefore, I naturally pointed to Mrs. Joe, and

put my mouth into the form of saying, “her?” But Joe wouldn’t hear of that, at all, and again opened his mouth very wide, and shook the form of a most emphatic word out of it. But I could make nothing of the word.

“Mrs. Joe,” said I, as a last resort, “I should like to know—if you wouldn’t much mind—where the firing comes from?”

“Lord bless the boy!” exclaimed my sister, as if she didn’t quite mean that but rather the contrary. “From the Hulks!”

“Oh-h!” said I, looking at Joe. “Hulks!”

Joe gave a reproachful cough, as much as to say, “Well, I told you so.”

“And please, what’s Hulks?” said I.

“That’s the way with this boy!” exclaimed my sister, pointing me out with her needle and thread, and shaking her head at me. “Answer him one question, and he’ll ask you a dozen directly. Hulks are prison-ships, right ’cross th’ meshes.” We always used that name for marshes, in our country.

“I wonder who’s put into prison-ships, and why they’re put there?” said I, in a general way, and with quiet desperation.

It was too much for Mrs. Joe, who immediately rose. “I tell you what, young fellow,” said she, “I didn’t bring you up by hand to badger people’s lives out. It would be blame to me and not praise, if I had. People are put in the Hulks because they murder, and because they rob, and forge, and do all sorts of bad; and they always begin by asking questions. Now, you get along to bed!”

I was never allowed a candle to light me to bed, and, as I went up stairs in the dark, with my head tingling,—from Mrs. Joe’s thimble having played the tambourine upon it, to accompany her last words,—I felt fearfully sensible of the great convenience that the hulks were handy for me. I was clearly on my way there. I had begun by asking questions, and I was going to rob Mrs. Joe.

Since that time, which is far enough away now, I have often thought that few people know what secrecy there is in the young under terror. No matter how unreasonable the terror, so that it be terror. I was in mortal terror of the young man who wanted my heart and liver; I was in mortal terror of my interlocutor with the iron leg; I was in mortal terror of myself, from whom an awful promise had been extracted; I had no hope of deliverance through my all-powerful sister, who repulsed me at every turn; I am afraid to think of what I might have done on requirement, in the secrecy of my terror.

If I slept at all that night, it was only to imagine myself drifting down the river on a strong spring-tide, to the Hulks; a ghostly pirate calling out to me through a speaking-trumpet, as I passed the gibbet-station, that I had better come ashore and be hanged there at once, and not put it off. I was afraid to sleep, even if I had been inclined, for I knew that at the first faint dawn of morning I must rob the pantry. There was no doing it in the night, for there was no getting a light by easy friction then; to have got one I must have struck it out of flint and steel, and have made a noise like the very pirate himself rattling his chains.

As soon as the great black velvet pall outside my little window was shot with gray, I got up and went down stairs; every board upon the way, and every crack in every board calling after me, “Stop thief!” and “Get up, Mrs. Joe!” In the pantry, which was far more abundantly supplied than usual, owing to the season, I was very much alarmed by a hare hanging up by the heels, whom I rather thought I caught when my back was half turned, winking. I had no time for verification, no time for selection, no time for anything, for I had no time to spare. I stole some bread, some rind of cheese, about half a jar of mincemeat (which I tied up in my pocket-handkerchief with my last night’s slice), some brandy from a stone bottle (which I decanted into a glass bottle I had secretly used for making that intoxicating fluid, Spanish-liquorice-water, up in my room: diluting the stone bottle from a jug in the kitchen cupboard), a meat bone with very little on it, and a beautiful round compact pork pie. I was nearly going away without the pie, but I was tempted to mount upon a shelf, to look what it was that was put away so carefully in a covered earthen ware dish in a corner, and I found it was the pie, and I took it in the hope that it was not intended for early use, and would not be missed for some time.

There was a door in the kitchen, communicating with the forge; I unlocked and unbolted that door, and got a file from among Joe’s tools. Then I put the fastenings as I had found them, opened the door at which I had entered when I ran home last night, shut it, and ran for the misty marshes.

Chapter III

IT WAS A RIMY morning, and very damp. I had seen the damp lying on the outside of my little window, as if some goblin had been crying there all night, and using the window for a pocket-handkerchief. Now, I saw the damp lying on the bare hedges and spare grass, like a coarser sort of spiders' webs; hanging itself from twig to twig and blade to blade. On every rail and gate, wet lay clammy, and the marsh mist was so thick, that the wooden finger on the post directing people to our village—a direction which they never accepted, for they never came there—was invisible to me until I was quite close under it. Then, as I looked up at it, while it dripped, it seemed to my oppressed conscience like a phantom devoting me to the Hulks.

The mist was heavier yet when I got out upon the marshes, so that instead of my running at everything, everything seemed to run at me. This was very disagreeable to a guilty mind. The gates and dikes and banks came bursting at me through the mist, as if they cried as plainly as could be, "A boy with Somebody's else's pork pie! Stop him!" The cattle came upon me with like suddenness, staring out of their eyes, and steaming out of their nostrils, "Halloa, young thief!" One black ox, with a white cravat on,—who even had to my awakened conscience something of a clerical air,—fixed me so obstinately with his eyes, and moved his blunt head round in such an accusatory manner as I moved round, that I blubbered out to him, "I couldn't help it, sir! It wasn't for myself I took it!" Upon which he put down his head, blew a cloud of smoke out of his nose, and vanished with a kick-up of his hind-legs and a flourish of his tail.

All this time, I was getting on towards the river; but however fast I went, I couldn't warm my feet, to which the damp cold seemed riveted, as the iron was riveted to the leg of the man I was running to meet. I knew my way to

the Battery, pretty straight, for I had been down there on a Sunday with Joe, and Joe, sitting on an old gun, had told me that when I was ’prentice to him, regularly bound, we would have such Larks there! However, in the confusion of the mist, I found myself at last too far to the right, and consequently had to try back along the river-side, on the bank of loose stones above the mud and the stakes that staked the tide out. Making my way along here with all despatch, I had just crossed a ditch which I knew to be very near the Battery, and had just scrambled up the mound beyond the ditch, when I saw the man sitting before me. His back was towards me, and he had his arms folded, and was nodding forward, heavy with sleep.

I thought he would be more glad if I came upon him with his breakfast, in that unexpected manner, so I went forward softly and touched him on the shoulder. He instantly jumped up, and it was not the same man, but another man!

And yet this man was dressed in coarse gray, too, and had a great iron on his leg, and was lame, and hoarse, and cold, and was everything that the other man was; except that he had not the same face, and had a flat broad-brimmed low-crowned felt hat on. All this I saw in a moment, for I had only a moment to see it in: he swore an oath at me, made a hit at me,—it was a round weak blow that missed me and almost knocked himself down, for it made him stumble,—and then he ran into the mist, stumbling twice as he went, and I lost him.

“It’s the young man!” I thought, feeling my heart shoot as I identified him. I dare say I should have felt a pain in my liver, too, if I had known where it was.

I was soon at the Battery after that, and there was the right Man,—hugging himself and limping to and fro, as if he had never all night left off hugging and limping,—waiting for me. He was awfully cold, to be sure. I half expected to see him drop down before my face and die of deadly cold. His eyes looked so awfully hungry too, that when I handed him the file and he laid it down on the grass, it occurred to me he would have tried to eat it, if he had not seen my bundle. He did not turn me upside down this time to get at what I had, but left me right side upwards while I opened the bundle and emptied my pockets.

“What’s in the bottle, boy?” said he.

“Brandy,” said I.

He was already handing mincemeat down his throat in the most curious manner,—more like a man who was putting it away somewhere in a violent hurry, than a man who was eating it,—but he left off to take some of the liquor. He shivered all the while so violently, that it was quite as much as he could do to keep the neck of the bottle between his teeth, without biting it off.

“I think you have got the ague,” said I.

“I’m much of your opinion, boy,” said he.

“It’s bad about here,” I told him. “You’ve been lying out on the meshes, and they’re dreadful aguish. Rheumatic too.”

“I’ll eat my breakfast afore they’re the death of me,” said he. “I’d do that, if I was going to be strung up to that there gallows as there is over there, directly afterwards. I’ll beat the shivers so far, I’ll bet you.”

He was gobbling mincemeat, meatbone, bread, cheese, and pork pie, all at once: staring distrustfully while he did so at the mist all round us, and often stopping—even stopping his jaws—to listen. Some real or fancied sound, some clink upon the river or breathing of beast upon the marsh, now gave him a start, and he said, suddenly,—

“You’re not a deceiving imp? You brought no one with you?”

“No, sir! No!”

“Nor giv’ no one the office to follow you?”

“No!”

“Well,” said he, “I believe you. You’d be but a fierce young hound indeed, if at your time of life you could help to hunt a wretched warmint hunted as near death and dunghill as this poor wretched warmint is!”

Something clicked in his throat as if he had works in him like a clock, and was going to strike. And he smeared his ragged rough sleeve over his eyes.

Pitying his desolation, and watching him as he gradually settled down upon the pie, I made bold to say, “I am glad you enjoy it.”

“Did you speak?”

“I said I was glad you enjoyed it.”

“Thankee, my boy. I do.”

I had often watched a large dog of ours eating his food; and I now noticed a decided similarity between the dog’s way of eating, and the man’s. The man took strong sharp sudden bites, just like the dog. He

swallowed, or rather snapped up, every mouthful, too soon and too fast; and he looked sideways here and there while he ate, as if he thought there was danger in every direction of somebody's coming to take the pie away. He was altogether too unsettled in his mind over it, to appreciate it comfortably I thought, or to have anybody to dine with him, without making a chop with his jaws at the visitor. In all of which particulars he was very like the dog.

"I am afraid you won't leave any of it for him," said I, timidly; after a silence during which I had hesitated as to the politeness of making the remark. "There's no more to be got where that came from." It was the certainty of this fact that impelled me to offer the hint.

"Leave any for him? Who's him?" said my friend, stopping in his crunching of pie-crust.

"The young man. That you spoke of. That was hid with you."

"Oh ah!" he returned, with something like a gruff laugh. "Him? Yes, yes! He don't want no wittles."

"I thought he looked as if he did," said I.

The man stopped eating, and regarded me with the keenest scrutiny and the greatest surprise.

"Looked? When?"

"Just now."

"Where?"

"Yonder," said I, pointing; "over there, where I found him nodding asleep, and thought it was you."

He held me by the collar and stared at me so, that I began to think his first idea about cutting my throat had revived.

"Dressed like you, you know, only with a hat," I explained, trembling; "and—and"—I was very anxious to put this delicately—"and with—the same reason for wanting to borrow a file. Didn't you hear the cannon last night?"

"Then there was firing!" he said to himself.

"I wonder you shouldn't have been sure of that," I returned, "for we heard it up at home, and that's farther away, and we were shut in besides."

"Why, see now!" said he. "When a man's alone on these flats, with a light head and a light stomach, perishing of cold and want, he hears nothin' all night, but guns firing, and voices calling. Hears? He sees the soldiers, with their red coats lighted up by the torches carried afore, closing in round

him. Hears his number called, hears himself challenged, hears the rattle of the muskets, hears the orders ‘Make ready! Present! Cover him steady, men!’ and is laid hands on—and there’s nothin’! Why, if I see one pursuing party last night—coming up in order, Damn ’em, with their tramp, tramp—I see a hundred. And as to firing! Why, I see the mist shake with the cannon, arter it was broad day,—But this man”; he had said all the rest, as if he had forgotten my being there; “did you notice anything in him?”

“He had a badly bruised face,” said I, recalling what I hardly knew I knew.

“Not here?” exclaimed the man, striking his left cheek mercilessly, with the flat of his hand.

“Yes, there!”

“Where is he?” He crammed what little food was left, into the breast of his gray jacket. “Show me the way he went. I’ll pull him down, like a bloodhound. Curse this iron on my sore leg! Give us hold of the file, boy.”

I indicated in what direction the mist had shrouded the other man, and he looked up at it for an instant. But he was down on the rank wet grass, filing at his iron like a madman, and not minding me or minding his own leg, which had an old chafe upon it and was bloody, but which he handled as roughly as if it had no more feeling in it than the file. I was very much afraid of him again, now that he had worked himself into this fierce hurry, and I was likewise very much afraid of keeping away from home any longer. I told him I must go, but he took no notice, so I thought the best thing I could do was to slip off. The last I saw of him, his head was bent over his knee and he was working hard at his fetter, muttering impatient imprecations at it and at his leg. The last I heard of him, I stopped in the mist to listen, and the file was still going.

Chapter IV

I FULLY EXPECTED TO find a Constable in the kitchen, waiting to take me up. But not only was there no Constable there, but no discovery had yet been made of the robbery. Mrs. Joe was prodigiously busy in getting the house ready for the festivities of the day, and Joe had been put upon the kitchen doorstep to keep him out of the dust-pan,—an article into which his destiny always led him, sooner or later, when my sister was vigorously reaping the floors of her establishment.

"And where the deuce ha' you been?" was Mrs. Joe's Christmas salutation, when I and my conscience showed ourselves.

I said I had been down to hear the Carols. "Ah! well!" observed Mrs. Joe. "You might ha' done worse." Not a doubt of that I thought.

"Perhaps if I warn't a blacksmith's wife, and (what's the same thing) a slave with her apron never off, I should have been to hear the Carols," said Mrs. Joe. "I'm rather partial to Carols, myself, and that's the best of reasons for my never hearing any."

Joe, who had ventured into the kitchen after me as the dustpan had retired before us, drew the back of his hand across his nose with a conciliatory air, when Mrs. Joe darted a look at him, and, when her eyes were withdrawn, secretly crossed his two forefingers, and exhibited them to me, as our token that Mrs. Joe was in a cross temper. This was so much her normal state, that Joe and I would often, for weeks together, be, as to our fingers, like monumental Crusaders as to their legs.

We were to have a superb dinner, consisting of a leg of pickled pork and greens, and a pair of roast stuffed fowls. A handsome mince-pie had been made yesterday morning (which accounted for the mincemeat not being missed), and the pudding was already on the boil. These extensive arrangements occasioned us to be cut off unceremoniously in respect of

breakfast; “for I ain’t,” said Mrs. Joe,—“I ain’t a going to have no formal cramming and busting and washing up now, with what I’ve got before me, I promise you!”

So, we had our slices served out, as if we were two thousand troops on a forced march instead of a man and boy at home; and we took gulps of milk and water, with apologetic countenances, from a jug on the dresser. In the meantime, Mrs. Joe put clean white curtains up, and tacked a new flowered flounce across the wide chimney to replace the old one, and uncovered the little state parlor across the passage, which was never uncovered at any other time, but passed the rest of the year in a cool haze of silver paper, which even extended to the four little white crockery poodles on the mantel-shelf, each with a black nose and a basket of flowers in his mouth, and each the counterpart of the other. Mrs. Joe was a very clean housekeeper, but had an exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable and unacceptable than dirt itself. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and some people do the same by their religion.

My sister, having so much to do, was going to church vicariously, that is to say, Joe and I were going. In his working-clothes, Joe was a well-knit characteristic-looking blacksmith; in his holiday clothes, he was more like a scarecrow in good circumstances, than anything else. Nothing that he wore then fitted him or seemed to belong to him; and everything that he wore then grazed him. On the present festive occasion he emerged from his room, when the blithe bells were going, the picture of misery, in a full suit of Sunday penitentials. As to me, I think my sister must have had some general idea that I was a young offender whom an Accoucheur Policeman had taken up (on my birthday) and delivered over to her, to be dealt with according to the outraged majesty of the law. I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality, and against the dissuading arguments of my best friends. Even when I was taken to have a new suit of clothes, the tailor had orders to make them like a kind of Reformatory, and on no account to let me have the free use of my limbs.

Joe and I going to church, therefore, must have been a moving spectacle for compassionate minds. Yet, what I suffered outside was nothing to what I underwent within. The terrors that had assailed me whenever Mrs. Joe had gone near the pantry, or out of the room, were only to be equalled by the

remorse with which my mind dwelt on what my hands had done. Under the weight of my wicked secret, I pondered whether the Church would be powerful enough to shield me from the vengeance of the terrible young man, if I divulged to that establishment. I conceived the idea that the time when the banns were read and when the clergyman said, “Ye are now to declare it!” would be the time for me to rise and propose a private conference in the vestry. I am far from being sure that I might not have astonished our small congregation by resorting to this extreme measure, but for its being Christmas Day and no Sunday.

Mr. Wopsle, the clerk at church, was to dine with us; and Mr. Hubble the wheelwright and Mrs. Hubble; and Uncle Pumblechook (Joe’s uncle, but Mrs. Joe appropriated him), who was a well-to-do cornchandler in the nearest town, and drove his own chaise-cart. The dinner hour was half-past one. When Joe and I got home, we found the table laid, and Mrs. Joe dressed, and the dinner dressing, and the front door unlocked (it never was at any other time) for the company to enter by, and everything most splendid. And still, not a word of the robbery.

The time came, without bringing with it any relief to my feelings, and the company came. Mr. Wopsle, united to a Roman nose and a large shining bald forehead, had a deep voice which he was uncommonly proud of; indeed it was understood among his acquaintance that if you could only give him his head, he would read the clergyman into fits; he himself confessed that if the Church was “thrown open,” meaning to competition, he would not despair of making his mark in it. The Church not being “thrown open,” he was, as I have said, our clerk. But he punished the Amens tremendously; and when he gave out the psalm,—always giving the whole verse,—he looked all round the congregation first, as much as to say, “You have heard my friend overhead; oblige me with your opinion of this style!”

I opened the door to the company,—making believe that it was a habit of ours to open that door,—and I opened it first to Mr. Wopsle, next to Mr. and Mrs. Hubble, and last of all to Uncle Pumblechook. N.B. I was not allowed to call him uncle, under the severest penalties.

“Mrs. Joe,” said Uncle Pumblechook, a large hard-breathing middle-aged slow man, with a mouth like a fish, dull staring eyes, and sandy hair standing upright on his head, so that he looked as if he had just been all but

choked, and had that moment come to, “I have brought you as the compliments of the season—I have brought you, Mum, a bottle of sherry wine—and I have brought you, Mum, a bottle of port wine.”

Every Christmas Day he presented himself, as a profound novelty, with exactly the same words, and carrying the two bottles like dumb-bells. Every Christmas Day, Mrs. Joe replied, as she now replied, “O, Un—cle Pum—ble—chook! This is kind!” Every Christmas Day, he retorted, as he now retorted, “It’s no more than your merits. And now are you all bobbish, and how’s Sixpennorth of halfpence?” meaning me.

We dined on these occasions in the kitchen, and adjourned, for the nuts and oranges and apples to the parlor; which was a change very like Joe’s change from his working-clothes to his Sunday dress. My sister was uncommonly lively on the present occasion, and indeed was generally more gracious in the society of Mrs. Hubble than in other company. I remember Mrs. Hubble as a little curly sharp-edged person in sky-blue, who held a conventionally juvenile position, because she had married Mr. Hubble,—I don’t know at what remote period,—when she was much younger than he. I remember Mr. Hubble as a tough, high-shouldered, stooping old man, of a sawdusty fragrance, with his legs extraordinarily wide apart: so that in my short days I always saw some miles of open country between them when I met him coming up the lane.

Among this good company I should have felt myself, even if I hadn’t robbed the pantry, in a false position. Not because I was squeezed in at an acute angle of the tablecloth, with the table in my chest, and the Pumblechookian elbow in my eye, nor because I was not allowed to speak (I didn’t want to speak), nor because I was regaled with the scaly tips of the drumsticks of the fowls, and with those obscure corners of pork of which the pig, when living, had had the least reason to be vain. No; I should not have minded that, if they would only have left me alone. But they wouldn’t leave me alone. They seemed to think the opportunity lost, if they failed to point the conversation at me, every now and then, and stick the point into me. I might have been an unfortunate little bull in a Spanish arena, I got so smartingly touched up by these moral goads.

It began the moment we sat down to dinner. Mr. Wopsle said grace with theatrical declamation,—as it now appears to me, something like a religious cross of the Ghost in Hamlet with Richard the Third,—and ended with the

very proper aspiration that we might be truly grateful. Upon which my sister fixed me with her eye, and said, in a low reproachful voice, “Do you hear that? Be grateful.”

“Especially,” said Mr. Pumblechook, “be grateful, boy, to them which brought you up by hand.”

Mrs. Hubble shook her head, and contemplating me with a mournful presentiment that I should come to no good, asked, “Why is it that the young are never grateful?” This moral mystery seemed too much for the company until Mr. Hubble tersely solved it by saying, “Naterally wicious.” Everybody then murmured “True!” and looked at me in a particularly unpleasant and personal manner.

Joe’s station and influence were something feebler (if possible) when there was company than when there was none. But he always aided and comforted me when he could, in some way of his own, and he always did so at dinner-time by giving me gravy, if there were any. There being plenty of gravy to-day, Joe spooned into my plate, at this point, about half a pint.

A little later on in the dinner, Mr. Wopsle reviewed the sermon with some severity, and intimated—in the usual hypothetical case of the Church being “thrown open”—what kind of sermon he would have given them. After favoring them with some heads of that discourse, he remarked that he considered the subject of the day’s homily, ill chosen; which was the less excusable, he added, when there were so many subjects “going about.”

“True again,” said Uncle Pumblechook. “You’ve hit it, sir! Plenty of subjects going about, for them that know how to put salt upon their tails. That’s what’s wanted. A man needn’t go far to find a subject, if he’s ready with his salt-box.” Mr. Pumblechook added, after a short interval of reflection, “Look at Pork alone. There’s a subject! If you want a subject, look at Pork!”

“True, sir. Many a moral for the young,” returned Mr. Wopsle,—and I knew he was going to lug me in, before he said it; “might be deduced from that text.”

(“You listen to this,” said my sister to me, in a severe parenthesis.)

Joe gave me some more gravy.

“Swine,” pursued Mr. Wopsle, in his deepest voice, and pointing his fork at my blushes, as if he were mentioning my Christian name,—“swine were the companions of the prodigal. The gluttony of Swine is put before us, as

an example to the young." (I thought this pretty well in him who had been praising up the pork for being so plump and juicy.) "What is detestable in a pig is more detestable in a boy."

"Or girl," suggested Mr. Hubble.

"Of course, or girl, Mr. Hubble," assented Mr. Wopsle, rather irritably, "but there is no girl present."

"Besides," said Mr. Pumblechook, turning sharp on me, "think what you've got to be grateful for. If you'd been born a Squeaker—"

"He was, if ever a child was," said my sister, most emphatically.

Joe gave me some more gravy.

"Well, but I mean a four-footed Squeaker," said Mr. Pumblechook. "If you had been born such, would you have been here now? Not you—"

"Unless in that form," said Mr. Wopsle, nodding towards the dish.

"But I don't mean in that form, sir," returned Mr. Pumblechook, who had an objection to being interrupted; "I mean, enjoying himself with his elders and betters, and improving himself with their conversation, and rolling in the lap of luxury. Would he have been doing that? No, he wouldn't. And what would have been your destination?" turning on me again. "You would have been disposed of for so many shillings according to the market price of the article, and Dunstable the butcher would have come up to you as you lay in your straw, and he would have whipped you under his left arm, and with his right he would have tucked up his frock to get a penknife from out of his waistcoat-pocket, and he would have shed your blood and had your life. No bringing up by hand then. Not a bit of it!"

Joe offered me more gravy, which I was afraid to take.

"He was a world of trouble to you, ma'am," said Mrs. Hubble, commiserating my sister.

"Trouble?" echoed my sister; "trouble?" and then entered on a fearful catalogue of all the illnesses I had been guilty of, and all the acts of sleeplessness I had committed, and all the high places I had tumbled from, and all the low places I had tumbled into, and all the injuries I had done myself, and all the times she had wished me in my grave, and I had contumaciously refused to go there.

I think the Romans must have aggravated one another very much, with their noses. Perhaps, they became the restless people they were, in consequence. Anyhow, Mr. Wopsle's Roman nose so aggravated me, during

the recital of my misdemeanours, that I should have liked to pull it until he howled. But, all I had endured up to this time was nothing in comparison with the awful feelings that took possession of me when the pause was broken which ensued upon my sister's recital, and in which pause everybody had looked at me (as I felt painfully conscious) with indignation and abhorrence.

"Yet," said Mr. Pumblechook, leading the company gently back to the theme from which they had strayed, "Pork—regarded as biled—is rich, too; ain't it?"

"Have a little brandy, uncle," said my sister.

O Heavens, it had come at last! He would find it was weak, he would say it was weak, and I was lost! I held tight to the leg of the table under the cloth, with both hands, and awaited my fate.

My sister went for the stone bottle, came back with the stone bottle, and poured his brandy out: no one else taking any. The wretched man trifled with his glass,—took it up, looked at it through the light, put it down,—prolonged my misery. All this time Mrs. Joe and Joe were briskly clearing the table for the pie and pudding.

I couldn't keep my eyes off him. Always holding tight by the leg of the table with my hands and feet, I saw the miserable creature finger his glass playfully, take it up, smile, throw his head back, and drink the brandy off. Instantly afterwards, the company were seized with unspeakable consternation, owing to his springing to his feet, turning round several times in an appalling spasmodic whooping-cough dance, and rushing out at the door; he then became visible through the window, violently plunging and expectorating, making the most hideous faces, and apparently out of his mind.

I held on tight, while Mrs. Joe and Joe ran to him. I didn't know how I had done it, but I had no doubt I had murdered him somehow. In my dreadful situation, it was a relief when he was brought back, and surveying the company all round as if they had disagreed with him, sank down into his chair with the one significant gasp, "Tar!"

I had filled up the bottle from the tar-water jug. I knew he would be worse by and by. I moved the table, like a Medium of the present day, by the vigor of my unseen hold upon it.

"Tar!" cried my sister, in amazement. "Why, how ever could Tar come

there?”

But, Uncle Pumblechook, who was omnipotent in that kitchen, wouldn’t hear the word, wouldn’t hear of the subject, imperiously waved it all away with his hand, and asked for hot gin and water. My sister, who had begun to be alarmingly meditative, had to employ herself actively in getting the gin, the hot water, the sugar, and the lemon-peel, and mixing them. For the time being at least, I was saved. I still held on to the leg of the table, but clutched it now with the fervor of gratitude.

By degrees, I became calm enough to release my grasp and partake of pudding. Mr. Pumblechook partook of pudding. All partook of pudding. The course terminated, and Mr. Pumblechook had begun to beam under the genial influence of gin and water. I began to think I should get over the day, when my sister said to Joe, “Clean plates,—cold.”

I clutched the leg of the table again immediately, and pressed it to my bosom as if it had been the companion of my youth and friend of my soul. I foresaw what was coming, and I felt that this time I really was gone.

“You must taste,” said my sister, addressing the guests with her best grace—“you must taste, to finish with, such a delightful and delicious present of Uncle Pumblechook’s!”

Must they! Let them not hope to taste it!

“You must know,” said my sister, rising, “it’s a pie; a savory pork pie.”

The company murmured their compliments. Uncle Pumblechook, sensible of having deserved well of his fellow-creatures, said,—quite vivaciously, all things considered,—“Well, Mrs. Joe, we’ll do our best endeavors; let us have a cut at this same pie.”

My sister went out to get it. I heard her steps proceed to the pantry. I saw Mr. Pumblechook balance his knife. I saw reawakening appetite in the Roman nostrils of Mr. Wopsle. I heard Mr. Hubble remark that “a bit of savory pork pie would lay atop of anything you could mention, and do no harm,” and I heard Joe say, “You shall have some, Pip.” I have never been absolutely certain whether I uttered a shrill yell of terror, merely in spirit, or in the bodily hearing of the company. I felt that I could bear no more, and that I must run away. I released the leg of the table, and ran for my life.

But I ran no farther than the house door, for there I ran head-foremost into a party of soldiers with their muskets, one of whom held out a pair of handcuffs to me, saying, “Here you are, look sharp, come on!”

Chapter V

THE APPARITION OF A file of soldiers ringing down the but-ends of their loaded muskets on our door-step, caused the dinner-party to rise from table in confusion, and caused Mrs. Joe re-entering the kitchen empty-handed, to stop short and stare, in her wondering lament of “Gracious goodness gracious me, what’s gone—with the—pie!”

The sergeant and I were in the kitchen when Mrs. Joe stood staring; at which crisis I partially recovered the use of my senses. It was the sergeant who had spoken to me, and he was now looking round at the company, with his handcuffs invitingly extended towards them in his right hand, and his left on my shoulder.

“Excuse me, ladies and gentleman,” said the sergeant, “but as I have mentioned at the door to this smart young shaver,” (which he hadn’t), “I am on a chase in the name of the king, and I want the blacksmith.”

“And pray what might you want with him?” retorted my sister, quick to resent his being wanted at all.

“Missis,” returned the gallant sergeant, “speaking for myself, I should reply, the honor and pleasure of his fine wife’s acquaintance; speaking for the king, I answer, a little job done.”

This was received as rather neat in the sergeant; insomuch that Mr. Pumblechook cried audibly, “Good again!”

“You see, blacksmith,” said the sergeant, who had by this time picked out Joe with his eye, “we have had an accident with these, and I find the lock of one of ’em goes wrong, and the coupling don’t act pretty. As they are wanted for immediate service, will you throw your eye over them?”

Joe threw his eye over them, and pronounced that the job would necessitate the lighting of his forge fire, and would take nearer two hours than one. “Will it? Then will you set about it at once, blacksmith?” said the

off-hand sergeant, “as it’s on his Majesty’s service. And if my men can bear a hand anywhere, they’ll make themselves useful.” With that, he called to his men, who came trooping into the kitchen one after another, and piled their arms in a corner. And then they stood about, as soldiers do; now, with their hands loosely clasped before them; now, resting a knee or a shoulder; now, easing a belt or a pouch; now, opening the door to spit stiffly over their high stocks, out into the yard.

All these things I saw without then knowing that I saw them, for I was in an agony of apprehension. But beginning to perceive that the handcuffs were not for me, and that the military had so far got the better of the pie as to put it in the background, I collected a little more of my scattered wits.

“Would you give me the time?” said the sergeant, addressing himself to Mr. Pumblechook, as to a man whose appreciative powers justified the inference that he was equal to the time.

“It’s just gone half past two.”

“That’s not so bad,” said the sergeant, reflecting; “even if I was forced to halt here nigh two hours, that’ll do. How far might you call yourselves from the marshes, hereabouts? Not above a mile, I reckon?”

“Just a mile,” said Mrs. Joe.

“That’ll do. We begin to close in upon ’em about dusk. A little before dusk, my orders are. That’ll do.”

“Convicts, sergeant?” asked Mr. Wopsle, in a matter-of-course way.

“Ay!” returned the sergeant, “two. They’re pretty well known to be out on the marshes still, and they won’t try to get clear of ’em before dusk. Anybody here seen anything of any such game?”

Everybody, myself excepted, said no, with confidence. Nobody thought of me.

“Well!” said the sergeant, “they’ll find themselves trapped in a circle, I expect, sooner than they count on. Now, blacksmith! If you’re ready, his Majesty the King is.”

Joe had got his coat and waistcoat and cravat off, and his leather apron on, and passed into the forge. One of the soldiers opened its wooden windows, another lighted the fire, another turned to at the bellows, the rest stood round the blaze, which was soon roaring. Then Joe began to hammer and clink, hammer and clink, and we all looked on.

The interest of the impending pursuit not only absorbed the general

attention, but even made my sister liberal. She drew a pitcher of beer from the cask for the soldiers, and invited the sergeant to take a glass of brandy. But Mr. Pumblechook said, sharply, “Give him wine, Mum. I’ll engage there’s no Tar in that:” so, the sergeant thanked him and said that as he preferred his drink without tar, he would take wine, if it was equally convenient. When it was given him, he drank his Majesty’s health and compliments of the season, and took it all at a mouthful and smacked his lips.

“Good stuff, eh, sergeant?” said Mr. Pumblechook.

“I’ll tell you something,” returned the sergeant; “I suspect that stuff’s of your providing.”

Mr. Pumblechook, with a fat sort of laugh, said, “Ay, ay? Why?”

“Because,” returned the sergeant, clapping him on the shoulder, “you’re a man that knows what’s what.”

“D’ye think so?” said Mr. Pumblechook, with his former laugh. “Have another glass!”

“With you. Hob and nob,” returned the sergeant. “The top of mine to the foot of yours,—the foot of yours to the top of mine,—Ring once, ring twice, —the best tune on the Musical Glasses! Your health. May you live a thousand years, and never be a worse judge of the right sort than you are at the present moment of your life!”

The sergeant tossed off his glass again and seemed quite ready for another glass. I noticed that Mr. Pumblechook in his hospitality appeared to forget that he had made a present of the wine, but took the bottle from Mrs. Joe and had all the credit of handing it about in a gush of joviality. Even I got some. And he was so very free of the wine that he even called for the other bottle, and handed that about with the same liberality, when the first was gone.

As I watched them while they all stood clustering about the forge, enjoying themselves so much, I thought what terrible good sauce for a dinner my fugitive friend on the marshes was. They had not enjoyed themselves a quarter so much, before the entertainment was brightened with the excitement he furnished. And now, when they were all in lively anticipation of “the two villains” being taken, and when the bellows seemed to roar for the fugitives, the fire to flare for them, the smoke to hurry away in pursuit of them, Joe to hammer and clink for them, and all the murky

shadows on the wall to shake at them in menace as the blaze rose and sank, and the red-hot sparks dropped and died, the pale afternoon outside almost seemed in my pitying young fancy to have turned pale on their account, poor wretches.

At last, Joe's job was done, and the ringing and roaring stopped. As Joe got on his coat, he mustered courage to propose that some of us should go down with the soldiers and see what came of the hunt. Mr. Pumblechook and Mr. Hubble declined, on the plea of a pipe and ladies' society; but Mr. Wopsle said he would go, if Joe would. Joe said he was agreeable, and would take me, if Mrs. Joe approved. We never should have got leave to go, I am sure, but for Mrs. Joe's curiosity to know all about it and how it ended. As it was, she merely stipulated, "If you bring the boy back with his head blown to bits by a musket, don't look to me to put it together again."

The sergeant took a polite leave of the ladies, and parted from Mr. Pumblechook as from a comrade; though I doubt if he were quite as fully sensible of that gentleman's merits under arid conditions, as when something moist was going. His men resumed their muskets and fell in. Mr. Wopsle, Joe, and I, received strict charge to keep in the rear, and to speak no word after we reached the marshes. When we were all out in the raw air and were steadily moving towards our business, I treasonably whispered to Joe, "I hope, Joe, we shan't find them." and Joe whispered to me, "I'd give a shilling if they had cut and run, Pip."

We were joined by no stragglers from the village, for the weather was cold and threatening, the way dreary, the footing bad, darkness coming on, and the people had good fires in-doors and were keeping the day. A few faces hurried to glowing windows and looked after us, but none came out. We passed the finger-post, and held straight on to the churchyard. There we were stopped a few minutes by a signal from the sergeant's hand, while two or three of his men dispersed themselves among the graves, and also examined the porch. They came in again without finding anything, and then we struck out on the open marshes, through the gate at the side of the churchyard. A bitter sleet came rattling against us here on the east wind, and Joe took me on his back.

Now that we were out upon the dismal wilderness where they little thought I had been within eight or nine hours and had seen both men hiding, I considered for the first time, with great dread, if we should come upon

them, would my particular convict suppose that it was I who had brought the soldiers there? He had asked me if I was a deceiving imp, and he had said I should be a fierce young hound if I joined the hunt against him. Would he believe that I was both imp and hound in treacherous earnest, and had betrayed him?

It was of no use asking myself this question now. There I was, on Joe's back, and there was Joe beneath me, charging at the ditches like a hunter, and stimulating Mr. Wopsle not to tumble on his Roman nose, and to keep up with us. The soldiers were in front of us, extending into a pretty wide line with an interval between man and man. We were taking the course I had begun with, and from which I had diverged in the mist. Either the mist was not out again yet, or the wind had dispelled it. Under the low red glare of sunset, the beacon, and the gibbet, and the mound of the Battery, and the opposite shore of the river, were plain, though all of a watery lead color.

With my heart thumping like a blacksmith at Joe's broad shoulder, I looked all about for any sign of the convicts. I could see none, I could hear none. Mr. Wopsle had greatly alarmed me more than once, by his blowing and hard breathing; but I knew the sounds by this time, and could dissociate them from the object of pursuit. I got a dreadful start, when I thought I heard the file still going; but it was only a sheep-bell. The sheep stopped in their eating and looked timidly at us; and the cattle, their heads turned from the wind and sleet, stared angrily as if they held us responsible for both annoyances; but, except these things, and the shudder of the dying day in every blade of grass, there was no break in the bleak stillness of the marshes.

The soldiers were moving on in the direction of the old Battery, and we were moving on a little way behind them, when, all of a sudden, we all stopped. For there had reached us on the wings of the wind and rain, a long shout. It was repeated. It was at a distance towards the east, but it was long and loud. Nay, there seemed to be two or more shouts raised together,—if one might judge from a confusion in the sound.

To this effect the sergeant and the nearest men were speaking under their breath, when Joe and I came up. After another moment's listening, Joe (who was a good judge) agreed, and Mr. Wopsle (who was a bad judge) agreed. The sergeant, a decisive man, ordered that the sound should not be answered, but that the course should be changed, and that his men should

make towards it “at the double.” So we slanted to the right (where the East was), and Joe pounded away so wonderfully, that I had to hold on tight to keep my seat.

It was a run indeed now, and what Joe called, in the only two words he spoke all the time, “a Winder.” Down banks and up banks, and over gates, and splashing into dikes, and breaking among coarse rushes: no man cared where he went. As we came nearer to the shouting, it became more and more apparent that it was made by more than one voice. Sometimes, it seemed to stop altogether, and then the soldiers stopped. When it broke out again, the soldiers made for it at a greater rate than ever, and we after them. After a while, we had so run it down, that we could hear one voice calling “Murder!” and another voice, “Convicts! Runaways! Guard! This way for the runaway convicts!” Then both voices would seem to be stifled in a struggle, and then would break out again. And when it had come to this, the soldiers ran like deer, and Joe too.

The sergeant ran in first, when we had run the noise quite down, and two of his men ran in close upon him. Their pieces were cocked and levelled when we all ran in.

“Here are both men!” panted the sergeant, struggling at the bottom of a ditch. “Surrender, you two! and confound you for two wild beasts! Come asunder!”

Water was splashing, and mud was flying, and oaths were being sworn, and blows were being struck, when some more men went down into the ditch to help the sergeant, and dragged out, separately, my convict and the other one. Both were bleeding and panting and execrating and struggling; but of course I knew them both directly.

“Mind!” said my convict, wiping blood from his face with his ragged sleeves, and shaking torn hair from his fingers: “I took him! I give him up to you! Mind that!”

“It’s not much to be particular about,” said the sergeant; “it’ll do you small good, my man, being in the same plight yourself. Handcuffs there!”

“I don’t expect it to do me any good. I don’t want it to do me more good than it does now,” said my convict, with a greedy laugh. “I took him. He knows it. That’s enough for me.”

The other convict was livid to look at, and, in addition to the old bruised left side of his face, seemed to be bruised and torn all over. He could not so

much as get his breath to speak, until they were both separately handcuffed, but leaned upon a soldier to keep himself from falling.

“Take notice, guard,—he tried to murder me,” were his first words.

“Tried to murder him?” said my convict, disdainfully. “Try, and not do it? I took him, and giv’ him up; that’s what I done. I not only prevented him getting off the marshes, but I dragged him here,—dragged him this far on his way back. He’s a gentleman, if you please, this villain. Now, the Hulks has got its gentleman again, through me. Murder him? Worth my while, too, to murder him, when I could do worse and drag him back!”

The other one still gasped, “He tried—he tried—to—murder me. Bear—bear witness.”

“Lookee here!” said my convict to the sergeant. “Single-handed I got clear of the prison-ship; I made a dash and I done it. I could ha’ got clear of these death-cold flats likewise—look at my leg: you won’t find much iron on it—if I hadn’t made the discovery that he was here. Let him go free? Let him profit by the means as I found out? Let him make a tool of me afresh and again? Once more? No, no, no. If I had died at the bottom there,” and he made an emphatic swing at the ditch with his manacled hands, “I’d have held to him with that grip, that you should have been safe to find him in my hold.”

The other fugitive, who was evidently in extreme horror of his companion, repeated, “He tried to murder me. I should have been a dead man if you had not come up.”

“He lies!” said my convict, with fierce energy. “He’s a liar born, and he’ll die a liar. Look at his face; ain’t it written there? Let him turn those eyes of his on me. I defy him to do it.”

The other, with an effort at a scornful smile, which could not, however, collect the nervous working of his mouth into any set expression, looked at the soldiers, and looked about at the marshes and at the sky, but certainly did not look at the speaker.

“Do you see him?” pursued my convict. “Do you see what a villain he is? Do you see those grovelling and wandering eyes? That’s how he looked when we were tried together. He never looked at me.”

The other, always working and working his dry lips and turning his eyes restlessly about him far and near, did at last turn them for a moment on the speaker, with the words, “You are not much to look at,” and with a half-

taunting glance at the bound hands. At that point, my convict became so frantically exasperated, that he would have rushed upon him but for the interposition of the soldiers. “Didn’t I tell you,” said the other convict then, “that he would murder me, if he could?” And any one could see that he shook with fear, and that there broke out upon his lips curious white flakes, like thin snow.

“Enough of this parley,” said the sergeant. “Light those torches.”

As one of the soldiers, who carried a basket in lieu of a gun, went down on his knee to open it, my convict looked round him for the first time, and saw me. I had alighted from Joe’s back on the brink of the ditch when we came up, and had not moved since. I looked at him eagerly when he looked at me, and slightly moved my hands and shook my head. I had been waiting for him to see me that I might try to assure him of my innocence. It was not at all expressed to me that he even comprehended my intention, for he gave me a look that I did not understand, and it all passed in a moment. But if he had looked at me for an hour or for a day, I could not have remembered his face ever afterwards, as having been more attentive.

The soldier with the basket soon got a light, and lighted three or four torches, and took one himself and distributed the others. It had been almost dark before, but now it seemed quite dark, and soon afterwards very dark. Before we departed from that spot, four soldiers standing in a ring, fired twice into the air. Presently we saw other torches kindled at some distance behind us, and others on the marshes on the opposite bank of the river. “All right,” said the sergeant. “March.”

We had not gone far when three cannon were fired ahead of us with a sound that seemed to burst something inside my ear. “You are expected on board,” said the sergeant to my convict; “they know you are coming. Don’t straggle, my man. Close up here.”

The two were kept apart, and each walked surrounded by a separate guard. I had hold of Joe’s hand now, and Joe carried one of the torches. Mr. Wopsle had been for going back, but Joe was resolved to see it out, so we went on with the party. There was a reasonably good path now, mostly on the edge of the river, with a divergence here and there where a dike came, with a miniature windmill on it and a muddy sluice-gate. When I looked round, I could see the other lights coming in after us. The torches we carried dropped great blotches of fire upon the track, and I could see those,

too, lying smoking and flaring. I could see nothing else but black darkness. Our lights warmed the air about us with their pitchy blaze, and the two prisoners seemed rather to like that, as they limped along in the midst of the muskets. We could not go fast, because of their lameness; and they were so spent, that two or three times we had to halt while they rested.

After an hour or so of this travelling, we came to a rough wooden hut and a landing-place. There was a guard in the hut, and they challenged, and the sergeant answered. Then, we went into the hut, where there was a smell of tobacco and whitewash, and a bright fire, and a lamp, and a stand of muskets, and a drum, and a low wooden bedstead, like an overgrown mangle without the machinery, capable of holding about a dozen soldiers all at once. Three or four soldiers who lay upon it in their great-coats were not much interested in us, but just lifted their heads and took a sleepy stare, and then lay down again. The sergeant made some kind of report, and some entry in a book, and then the convict whom I call the other convict was drafted off with his guard, to go on board first.

My convict never looked at me, except that once. While we stood in the hut, he stood before the fire looking thoughtfully at it, or putting up his feet by turns upon the hob, and looking thoughtfully at them as if he pitied them for their recent adventures. Suddenly, he turned to the sergeant, and remarked,—

"I wish to say something respecting this escape. It may prevent some persons laying under suspicion alonger me."

"You can say what you like," returned the sergeant, standing coolly looking at him with his arms folded, "but you have no call to say it here. You'll have opportunity enough to say about it, and hear about it, before it's done with, you know."

"I know, but this is another pint, a separate matter. A man can't starve; at least I can't. I took some wittles, up at the willage over yonder,—where the church stands a'most out on the marshes."

"You mean stole," said the sergeant.

"And I'll tell you where from. From the blacksmith's."

"Halloa!" said the sergeant, staring at Joe.

"Halloa, Pip!" said Joe, staring at me.

"It was some broken wittles—that's what it was—and a dram of liquor, and a pie."

“Have you happened to miss such an article as a pie, blacksmith?” asked the sergeant, confidentially.

“My wife did, at the very moment when you came in. Don’t you know, Pip?”

“So,” said my convict, turning his eyes on Joe in a moody manner, and without the least glance at me,—“so you’re the blacksmith, are you? Than I’m sorry to say, I’ve eat your pie.”

“God knows you’re welcome to it,—so far as it was ever mine,” returned Joe, with a saving remembrance of Mrs. Joe. “We don’t know what you have done, but we wouldn’t have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creatur.—Would us, Pip?”

The something that I had noticed before, clicked in the man’s throat again, and he turned his back. The boat had returned, and his guard were ready, so we followed him to the landing-place made of rough stakes and stones, and saw him put into the boat, which was rowed by a crew of convicts like himself. No one seemed surprised to see him, or interested in seeing him, or glad to see him, or sorry to see him, or spoke a word, except that somebody in the boat growled as if to dogs, “Give way, you!” which was the signal for the dip of the oars. By the light of the torches, we saw the black Hulk lying out a little way from the mud of the shore, like a wicked Noah’s ark. Cribbed and barred and moored by massive rusty chains, the prison-ship seemed in my young eyes to be ironed like the prisoners. We saw the boat go alongside, and we saw him taken up the side and disappear. Then, the ends of the torches were flung hissing into the water, and went out, as if it were all over with him.

Chapter VI

MY STATE OF MIND regarding the pilfering from which I had been so unexpectedly exonerated did not impel me to frank disclosure; but I hope it had some dregs of good at the bottom of it.

I do not recall that I felt any tenderness of conscience in reference to Mrs. Joe, when the fear of being found out was lifted off me. But I loved Joe,—perhaps for no better reason in those early days than because the dear fellow let me love him,—and, as to him, my inner self was not so easily composed. It was much upon my mind (particularly when I first saw him looking about for his file) that I ought to tell Joe the whole truth. Yet I did not, and for the reason that I mistrusted that if I did, he would think me worse than I was. The fear of losing Joe's confidence, and of thenceforth sitting in the chimney corner at night staring drearily at my forever lost companion and friend, tied up my tongue. I morbidly represented to myself that if Joe knew it, I never afterwards could see him at the fireside feeling his fair whisker, without thinking that he was meditating on it. That, if Joe knew it, I never afterwards could see him glance, however casually, at yesterday's meat or pudding when it came on to-day's table, without thinking that he was debating whether I had been in the pantry. That, if Joe knew it, and at any subsequent period of our joint domestic life remarked that his beer was flat or thick, the conviction that he suspected Tar in it, would bring a rush of blood to my face. In a word, I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid doing what I knew to be wrong. I had had no intercourse with the world at that time, and I imitated none of its many inhabitants who act in this manner. Quite an untaught genius, I made the discovery of the line of action for myself.

As I was sleepy before we were far away from the prison-ship, Joe took me on his back again and carried me home. He must have had a tiresome

journey of it, for Mr. Wopsle, being knocked up, was in such a very bad temper that if the Church had been thrown open, he would probably have excommunicated the whole expedition, beginning with Joe and myself. In his lay capacity, he persisted in sitting down in the damp to such an insane extent, that when his coat was taken off to be dried at the kitchen fire, the circumstantial evidence on his trousers would have hanged him, if it had been a capital offence.

By that time, I was staggering on the kitchen floor like a little drunkard, through having been newly set upon my feet, and through having been fast asleep, and through waking in the heat and lights and noise of tongues. As I came to myself (with the aid of a heavy thump between the shoulders, and the restorative exclamation “Yah! Was there ever such a boy as this!” from my sister,) I found Joe telling them about the convict’s confession, and all the visitors suggesting different ways by which he had got into the pantry. Mr. Pumblechook made out, after carefully surveying the premises, that he had first got upon the roof of the forge, and had then got upon the roof of the house, and had then let himself down the kitchen chimney by a rope made of his bedding cut into strips; and as Mr. Pumblechook was very positive and drove his own chaise-cart—over Everybody—it was agreed that it must be so. Mr. Wopsle, indeed, wildly cried out, “No!” with the feeble malice of a tired man; but, as he had no theory, and no coat on, he was unanimously set at naught,—not to mention his smoking hard behind, as he stood with his back to the kitchen fire to draw the damp out: which was not calculated to inspire confidence.

This was all I heard that night before my sister clutched me, as a slumberous offence to the company’s eyesight, and assisted me up to bed with such a strong hand that I seemed to have fifty boots on, and to be dangling them all against the edges of the stairs. My state of mind, as I have described it, began before I was up in the morning, and lasted long after the subject had died out, and had ceased to be mentioned saving on exceptional occasions.

Chapter VII

AT THE TIME WHEN I stood in the churchyard reading the family tombstones, I had just enough learning to be able to spell them out. My construction even of their simple meaning was not very correct, for I read “wife of the Above” as a complimentary reference to my father’s exaltation to a better world; and if any one of my deceased relations had been referred to as “Below,” I have no doubt I should have formed the worst opinions of that member of the family. Neither were my notions of the theological positions to which my Catechism bound me, at all accurate; for, I have a lively remembrance that I supposed my declaration that I was to “walk in the same all the days of my life,” laid me under an obligation always to go through the village from our house in one particular direction, and never to vary it by turning down by the wheelwright’s or up by the mill.

When I was old enough, I was to be apprenticed to Joe, and until I could assume that dignity I was not to be what Mrs. Joe called “Pompeyed,” or (as I render it) pampered. Therefore, I was not only odd-boy about the forge, but if any neighbor happened to want an extra boy to frighten birds, or pick up stones, or do any such job, I was favored with the employment. In order, however, that our superior position might not be compromised thereby, a money-box was kept on the kitchen mantel-shelf, in to which it was publicly made known that all my earnings were dropped. I have an impression that they were to be contributed eventually towards the liquidation of the National Debt, but I know I had no hope of any personal participation in the treasure.

Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt kept an evening school in the village; that is to say, she was a ridiculous old woman of limited means and unlimited infirmity, who used to go to sleep from six to seven every evening, in the society of youth who paid two pence per week each, for the improving

opportunity of seeing her do it. She rented a small cottage, and Mr. Wopsle had the room up stairs, where we students used to overhear him reading aloud in a most dignified and terrific manner, and occasionally bumping on the ceiling. There was a fiction that Mr. Wopsle "examined" the scholars once a quarter. What he did on those occasions was to turn up his cuffs, stick up his hair, and give us Mark Antony's oration over the body of Caesar. This was always followed by Collins's Ode on the Passions, wherein I particularly venerated Mr. Wopsle as Revenge throwing his blood-stained sword in thunder down, and taking the War-denouncing trumpet with a withering look. It was not with me then, as it was in later life, when I fell into the society of the Passions, and compared them with Collins and Wopsle, rather to the disadvantage of both gentlemen.

Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, besides keeping this Educational Institution, kept in the same room—a little general shop. She had no idea what stock she had, or what the price of anything in it was; but there was a little greasy memorandum-book kept in a drawer, which served as a Catalogue of Prices, and by this oracle Biddy arranged all the shop transaction. Biddy was Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's granddaughter; I confess myself quite unequal to the working out of the problem, what relation she was to Mr. Wopsle. She was an orphan like myself; like me, too, had been brought up by hand. She was most noticeable, I thought, in respect of her extremities; for, her hair always wanted brushing, her hands always wanted washing, and her shoes always wanted mending and pulling up at heel. This description must be received with a week-day limitation. On Sundays, she went to church elaborated.

Much of my unassisted self, and more by the help of Biddy than of Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, I struggled through the alphabet as if it had been a bramble-bush; getting considerably worried and scratched by every letter. After that I fell among those thieves, the nine figures, who seemed every evening to do something new to disguise themselves and baffle recognition. But, at last I began, in a purblind groping way, to read, write, and cipher, on the very smallest scale.

One night I was sitting in the chimney corner with my slate, expending great efforts on the production of a letter to Joe. I think it must have been a full year after our hunt upon the marshes, for it was a long time after, and it was winter and a hard frost. With an alphabet on the hearth at my feet for reference, I contrived in an hour or two to print and smear this epistle:—

“MI DEER JO i OPE U R KR WITE WELL i OPE i SHAL SON B HABELL 4 2 TEEDGE U JO AN THEN WE SHORL B SO GLODD AN WEN i M PRENGTD 2 U JO WOT LARX AN BLEVE ME INF XN PIP.”

There was no indispensable necessity for my communicating with Joe by letter, inasmuch as he sat beside me and we were alone. But I delivered this written communication (slate and all) with my own hand, and Joe received it as a miracle of erudition.

“I say, Pip, old chap!” cried Joe, opening his blue eyes wide, “what a scholar you are! An’t you?”

“I should like to be,” said I, glancing at the slate as he held it; with a misgiving that the writing was rather hilly.

“Why, here’s a J,” said Joe, “and a O equal to anythink! Here’s a J and a O, Pip, and a J-O, Joe.”

I had never heard Joe read aloud to any greater extent than this monosyllable, and I had observed at church last Sunday, when I accidentally held our Prayer-Book upside down, that it seemed to suit his convenience quite as well as if it had been all right. Wishing to embrace the present occasion of finding out whether in teaching Joe, I should have to begin quite at the beginning, I said, “Ah! But read the rest, Jo.”

“The rest, eh, Pip?” said Joe, looking at it with a slow, searching eye, “One, two, three. Why, here’s three Js, and three Os, and three J-O, Joes in it, Pip!”

I leaned over Joe, and, with the aid of my forefinger read him the whole letter.

“Astonishing!” said Joe, when I had finished. “You *are* a scholar.”

“How do you spell Gargery, Joe?” I asked him, with a modest patronage.

“I don’t spell it at all,” said Joe.

“But supposing you did?”

“It can’t be supposed,” said Joe. “Tho’ I’m uncommon fond of reading, too.”

“Are you, Joe?”

“On-common. Give me,” said Joe, “a good book, or a good newspaper, and sit me down afore a good fire, and I ask no better. Lord!” he continued, after rubbing his knees a little, “when you do come to a J and a O, and says you, ‘Here, at last, is a J-O, Joe,’ how interesting reading is!”

I derived from this, that Joe’s education, like Steam, was yet in its

infancy. Pursuing the subject, I inquired,—

"Didn't you ever go to school, Joe, when you were as little as me?"

"No, Pip."

"Why didn't you ever go to school, Joe, when you were as little as me?"

"Well, Pip," said Joe, taking up the poker, and settling himself to his usual occupation when he was thoughtful, of slowly raking the fire between the lower bars; "I'll tell you. My father, Pip, he were given to drink, and when he were overtook with drink, he hammered away at my mother, most onmerciful. It were a'most the only hammering he did, indeed, 'xcepting at myself. And he hammered at me with a wigor only to be equalled by the wigor with which he didn't hammer at his anwil.—You're a listening and understanding, Pip?"

"Yes, Joe."

"'Consequence, my mother and me we ran away from my father several times; and then my mother she'd go out to work, and she'd say, 'Joe,' she'd say, 'now, please God, you shall have some schooling, child,' and she'd put me to school. But my father were that good in his hart that he couldn't abear to be without us. So, he'd come with a most tremenjous crowd and make such a row at the doors of the houses where we was, that they used to be obligated to have no more to do with us and to give us up to him. And then he took us home and hammered us. Which, you see, Pip," said Joe, pausing in his meditative raking of the fire, and looking at me, "were a drawback on my learning."

"Certainly, poor Joe!"

"Though mind you, Pip," said Joe, with a judicial touch or two of the poker on the top bar, "rendering unto all their doo, and maintaining equal justice betwixt man and man, my father were that good in his hart, don't you see?"

I didn't see; but I didn't say so.

"Well!" Joe pursued, "somebody must keep the pot a biling, Pip, or the pot won't bile, don't you know?"

I saw that, and said so.

"'Consequence, my father didn't make objections to my going to work; so I went to work at my present calling, which were his too, if he would have followed it, and I worked tolerable hard, I assure you, Pip. In time I were able to keep him, and I kep him till he went off in a purple leptic fit.

And it were my intentions to have had put upon his tombstone that, Whatsume'er the failings on his part, Remember reader he were that good in his heart."

Joe recited this couplet with such manifest pride and careful perspicuity, that I asked him if he had made it himself.

"I made it," said Joe, "my own self. I made it in a moment. It was like striking out a horseshoe complete, in a single blow. I never was so much surprised in all my life,—couldn't credit my own ed,—to tell you the truth, hardly believed it were my own ed. As I was saying, Pip, it were my intentions to have had it cut over him; but poetry costs money, cut it how you will, small or large, and it were not done. Not to mention bearers, all the money that could be spared were wanted for my mother. She were in poor elth, and quite broke. She weren't long of following, poor soul, and her share of peace come round at last."

Joe's blue eyes turned a little watery; he rubbed first one of them, and then the other, in a most uncongenial and uncomfortable manner, with the round knob on the top of the poker.

"It were but lonesome then," said Joe, "living here alone, and I got acquainted with your sister. Now, Pip,"—Joe looked firmly at me as if he knew I was not going to agree with him;—"your sister is a fine figure of a woman."

I could not help looking at the fire, in an obvious state of doubt.

"Whatever family opinions, or whatever the world's opinions, on that subject may be, Pip, your sister is," Joe tapped the top bar with the poker after every word following, "a—fine—figure—of—a—woman!"

I could think of nothing better to say than "I am glad you think so, Joe."

"So am I," returned Joe, catching me up. "I am glad I think so, Pip. A little redness or a little matter of Bone, here or there, what does it signify to Me?"

I sagaciously observed, if it didn't signify to him, to whom did it signify?

"Certainly!" assented Joe. "That's it. You're right, old chap! When I got acquainted with your sister, it were the talk how she was bringing you up by hand. Very kind of her too, all the folks said, and I said, along with all the folks. As to you," Joe pursued with a countenance expressive of seeing something very nasty indeed, "if you could have been aware how small and

flabby and mean you was, dear me, you'd have formed the most contemptible opinion of yourself!"

Not exactly relishing this, I said, "Never mind me, Joe."

"But I did mind you, Pip," he returned with tender simplicity. "When I offered to your sister to keep company, and to be asked in church at such times as she was willing and ready to come to the forge, I said to her, 'And bring the poor little child. God bless the poor little child,' I said to your sister, 'there's room for him at the forge!'"

I broke out crying and begging pardon, and hugged Joe round the neck: who dropped the poker to hug me, and to say, "Ever the best of friends; an't us, Pip? Don't cry, old chap!"

When this little interruption was over, Joe resumed:—

"Well, you see, Pip, and here we are! That's about where it lights; here we are! Now, when you take me in hand in my learning, Pip (and I tell you beforehand I am awful dull, most awful dull), Mrs. Joe mustn't see too much of what we're up to. It must be done, as I may say, on the sly. And why on the sly? I'll tell you why, Pip."

He had taken up the poker again; without which, I doubt if he could have proceeded in his demonstration.

"Your sister is given to government."

"Given to government, Joe?" I was startled, for I had some shadowy idea (and I am afraid I must add, hope) that Joe had divorced her in a favor of the Lords of the Admiralty, or Treasury.

"Given to government," said Joe. "Which I meantersay the government of you and myself."

"Oh!"

"And she an't over partial to having scholars on the premises," Joe continued, "and in partickler would not be over partial to my being a scholar, for fear as I might rise. Like a sort of rebel, don't you see?"

I was going to retort with an inquiry, and had got as far as "Why—" when Joe stopped me.

"Stay a bit. I know what you're a going to say, Pip; stay a bit! I don't deny that your sister comes the Mo-gul over us, now and again. I don't deny that she do throw us back-falls, and that she do drop down upon us heavy. At such times as when your sister is on the Ram-page, Pip," Joe sank his voice to a whisper and glanced at the door, "candor compels fur to admit

that she is a Buster."

Joe pronounced this word, as if it began with at least twelve capital Bs.

"Why don't I rise? That were your observation when I broke it off, Pip?"

"Yes, Joe."

"Well," said Joe, passing the poker into his left hand, that he might feel his whisker; and I had no hope of him whenever he took to that placid occupation; "your sister's a master-mind. A master-mind."

"What's that?" I asked, in some hope of bringing him to a stand. But Joe was readier with his definition than I had expected, and completely stopped me by arguing circularly, and answering with a fixed look, "Her."

"And I ain't a master-mind," Joe resumed, when he had unfixed his look, and got back to his whisker. "And last of all, Pip,—and this I want to say very serious to you, old chap,—I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest hart and never getting no peace in her mortal days, that I'm dead afeerd of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t'other way, and be a little ill-conwenienced myself. I wish it was only me that got put out, Pip; I wish there warn't no Tickler for you, old chap; I wish I could take it all on myself; but this is the up-and-down-and-straight on it, Pip, and I hope you'll overlook shortcomings."

Young as I was, I believe that I dated a new admiration of Joe from that night. We were equals afterwards, as we had been before; but, afterwards at quiet times when I sat looking at Joe and thinking about him, I had a new sensation of feeling conscious that I was looking up to Joe in my heart.

"However," said Joe, rising to replenish the fire; "here's the Dutch-clock a working himself up to being equal to strike Eight of 'em, and she's not come home yet! I hope Uncle Pumblechook's mare mayn't have set a forefoot on a piece o' ice, and gone down."

Mrs. Joe made occasional trips with Uncle Pumblechook on market-days, to assist him in buying such household stuffs and goods as required a woman's judgment; Uncle Pumblechook being a bachelor and reposing no confidences in his domestic servant. This was market-day, and Mrs. Joe was out on one of these expeditions.

Joe made the fire and swept the hearth, and then we went to the door to listen for the chaise-cart. It was a dry cold night, and the wind blew keenly, and the frost was white and hard. A man would die to-night of lying out on

the marshes, I thought. And then I looked at the stars, and considered how awful it would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude.

"Here comes the mare," said Joe, "ringing like a peal of bells!"

The sound of her iron shoes upon the hard road was quite musical, as she came along at a much brisker trot than usual. We got a chair out, ready for Mrs. Joe's alighting, and stirred up the fire that they might see a bright window, and took a final survey of the kitchen that nothing might be out of its place. When we had completed these preparations, they drove up, wrapped to the eyes. Mrs. Joe was soon landed, and Uncle Pumblechook was soon down too, covering the mare with a cloth, and we were soon all in the kitchen, carrying so much cold air in with us that it seemed to drive all the heat out of the fire.

"Now," said Mrs. Joe, unwrapping herself with haste and excitement, and throwing her bonnet back on her shoulders where it hung by the strings, "if this boy ain't grateful this night, he never will be!"

I looked as grateful as any boy possibly could, who was wholly uninformed why he ought to assume that expression.

"It's only to be hoped," said my sister, "that he won't be Pompeyed. But I have my fears."

"She ain't in that line, Mum," said Mr. Pumblechook. "She knows better."

She? I looked at Joe, making the motion with my lips and eyebrows, "She?" Joe looked at me, making the motion with his lips and eyebrows, "She?" My sister catching him in the act, he drew the back of his hand across his nose with his usual conciliatory air on such occasions, and looked at her.

"Well?" said my sister, in her snappish way. "What are you staring at? Is the house afire?"

"—Which some individual," Joe politely hinted, "mentioned—she."

"And she is a she, I suppose?" said my sister. "Unless you call Miss Havisham a he. And I doubt if even you'll go so far as that."

"Miss Havisham, up town?" said Joe.

"Is there any Miss Havisham down town?" returned my sister.

"She wants this boy to go and play there. And of course he's going. And he had better play there," said my sister, shaking her head at me as an

encouragement to be extremely light and sportive, “or I’ll work him.”

I had heard of Miss Havisham up town,—everybody for miles round had heard of Miss Havisham up town,—as an immensely rich and grim lady who lived in a large and dismal house barricaded against robbers, and who led a life of seclusion.

“Well to be sure!” said Joe, astounded. “I wonder how she come to know Pip!”

“Noodle!” cried my sister. “Who said she knew him?”

“—Which some individual,” Joe again politely hinted, “mentioned that she wanted him to go and play there.”

“And couldn’t she ask Uncle Pumblechook if he knew of a boy to go and play there? Isn’t it just barely possible that Uncle Pumblechook may be a tenant of hers, and that he may sometimes—we won’t say quarterly or half-yearly, for that would be requiring too much of you—but sometimes—go there to pay his rent? And couldn’t she then ask Uncle Pumblechook if he knew of a boy to go and play there? And couldn’t Uncle Pumblechook, being always considerate and thoughtful for us—though you may not think it, Joseph,” in a tone of the deepest reproach, as if he were the most callous of nephews, “then mention this boy, standing Prancing here”—which I solemnly declare I was not doing—“that I have for ever been a willing slave to?”

“Good again!” cried Uncle Pumblechook. “Well put! Prettily pointed! Good indeed! Now Joseph, you know the case.”

“No, Joseph,” said my sister, still in a reproachful manner, while Joe apologetically drew the back of his hand across and across his nose, “you do not yet—though you may not think it—know the case. You may consider that you do, but you do not, Joseph. For you do not know that Uncle Pumblechook, being sensible that for anything we can tell, this boy’s fortune may be made by his going to Miss Havisham’s, has offered to take him into town to-night in his own chaise-cart, and to keep him to-night, and to take him with his own hands to Miss Havisham’s to-morrow morning. And Lor-a-mussy me!” cried my sister, casting off her bonnet in sudden desperation, “here I stand talking to mere Mooncalfs, with Uncle Pumblechook waiting, and the mare catching cold at the door, and the boy grimed with crock and dirt from the hair of his head to the sole of his foot!”

With that, she pounced upon me, like an eagle on a lamb, and my face

was squeezed into wooden bowls in sinks, and my head was put under taps of water-butts, and I was soaped, and kneaded, and towelled, and thumped, and harrowed, and rasped, until I really was quite beside myself. (I may here remark that I suppose myself to be better acquainted than any living authority, with the ridgy effect of a wedding-ring, passing unsympathetically over the human countenance.)

When my ablutions were completed, I was put into clean linen of the stiffest character, like a young penitent into sackcloth, and was trussed up in my tightest and fearfullest suit. I was then delivered over to Mr. Pumblechook, who formally received me as if he were the Sheriff, and who let off upon me the speech that I knew he had been dying to make all along: "Boy, be forever grateful to all friends, but especially unto them which brought you up by hand!"

"Good-bye, Joe!"

"God bless you, Pip, old chap!"

I had never parted from him before, and what with my feelings and what with soapsuds, I could at first see no stars from the chaise-cart. But they twinkled out one by one, without throwing any light on the questions why on earth I was going to play at Miss Havisham's, and what on earth I was expected to play at.

Chapter VIII

MR. PUMBLECHOOK'S PREMISES IN the High Street of the market town, were of a peppercorny and farinaceous character, as the premises of a cornchandler and seedsman should be. It appeared to me that he must be a very happy man indeed, to have so many little drawers in his shop; and I wondered when I peeped into one or two on the lower tiers, and saw the tied-up brown paper packets inside, whether the flower-seeds and bulbs ever wanted of a fine day to break out of those jails, and bloom.

It was in the early morning after my arrival that I entertained this speculation. On the previous night, I had been sent straight to bed in an attic with a sloping roof, which was so low in the corner where the bedstead was, that I calculated the tiles as being within a foot of my eyebrows. In the same early morning, I discovered a singular affinity between seeds and corduroys. Mr. Pumblechook wore corduroys, and so did his shopman; and somehow, there was a general air and flavor about the corduroys, so much in the nature of seeds, and a general air and flavor about the seeds, so much in the nature of corduroys, that I hardly knew which was which. The same opportunity served me for noticing that Mr. Pumblechook appeared to conduct his business by looking across the street at the saddler, who appeared to transact his business by keeping his eye on the coachmaker, who appeared to get on in life by putting his hands in his pockets and contemplating the baker, who in his turn folded his arms and stared at the grocer, who stood at his door and yawned at the chemist. The watchmaker, always poring over a little desk with a magnifying-glass at his eye, and always inspected by a group of smock-frocks poring over him through the glass of his shop-window, seemed to be about the only person in the High Street whose trade engaged his attention.

Mr. Pumblechook and I breakfasted at eight o'clock in the parlor behind

the shop, while the shopman took his mug of tea and hunch of bread and butter on a sack of peas in the front premises. I considered Mr. Pumblechook wretched company. Besides being possessed by my sister's idea that a mortifying and penitential character ought to be imparted to my diet,—besides giving me as much crumb as possible in combination with as little butter, and putting such a quantity of warm water into my milk that it would have been more candid to have left the milk out altogether,—his conversation consisted of nothing but arithmetic. On my politely bidding him Good morning, he said, pompously, "Seven times nine, boy?" And how should I be able to answer, dodged in that way, in a strange place, on an empty stomach! I was hungry, but before I had swallowed a morsel, he began a running sum that lasted all through the breakfast. "Seven?" "And four?" "And eight?" "And six?" "And two?" "And ten?" And so on. And after each figure was disposed of, it was as much as I could do to get a bite or a sup, before the next came; while he sat at his ease guessing nothing, and eating bacon and hot roll, in (if I may be allowed the expression) a gorging and gormandizing manner.

For such reasons, I was very glad when ten o'clock came and we started for Miss Havisham's; though I was not at all at my ease regarding the manner in which I should acquit myself under that lady's roof. Within a quarter of an hour we came to Miss Havisham's house, which was of old brick, and dismal, and had a great many iron bars to it. Some of the windows had been walled up; of those that remained, all the lower were rustily barred. There was a courtyard in front, and that was barred; so we had to wait, after ringing the bell, until some one should come to open it. While we waited at the gate, I peeped in (even then Mr. Pumblechook said, "And fourteen?" but I pretended not to hear him), and saw that at the side of the house there was a large brewery. No brewing was going on in it, and none seemed to have gone on for a long long time.

A window was raised, and a clear voice demanded "What name?" To which my conductor replied, "Pumblechook." The voice returned, "Quite right," and the window was shut again, and a young lady came across the court-yard, with keys in her hand.

"This," said Mr. Pumblechook, "is Pip."

"This is Pip, is it?" returned the young lady, who was very pretty and seemed very proud; "come in, Pip."

Mr. Pumblechook was coming in also, when she stopped him with the gate.

“Oh!” she said. “Did you wish to see Miss Havisham?”

“If Miss Havisham wished to see me,” returned Mr. Pumblechook, discomfited.

“Ah!” said the girl; “but you see she don’t.”

She said it so finally, and in such an undiscussible way, that Mr. Pumblechook, though in a condition of ruffled dignity, could not protest. But he eyed me severely,—as if I had done anything to him!—and departed with the words reproachfully delivered: “Boy! Let your behavior here be a credit unto them which brought you up by hand!” I was not free from apprehension that he would come back to propound through the gate, “And sixteen?” But he didn’t.

My young conductress locked the gate, and we went across the courtyard. It was paved and clean, but grass was growing in every crevice. The brewery buildings had a little lane of communication with it, and the wooden gates of that lane stood open, and all the brewery beyond stood open, away to the high enclosing wall; and all was empty and disused. The cold wind seemed to blow colder there than outside the gate; and it made a shrill noise in howling in and out at the open sides of the brewery, like the noise of wind in the rigging of a ship at sea.

She saw me looking at it, and she said, “You could drink without hurt all the strong beer that’s brewed there now, boy.”

“I should think I could, miss,” said I, in a shy way.

“Better not try to brew beer there now, or it would turn out sour, boy; don’t you think so?”

“It looks like it, miss.”

“Not that anybody means to try,” she added, “for that’s all done with, and the place will stand as idle as it is till it falls. As to strong beer, there’s enough of it in the cellars already, to drown the Manor House.”

“Is that the name of this house, miss?”

“One of its names, boy.”

“It has more than one, then, miss?”

“One more. Its other name was Satis; which is Greek, or Latin, or Hebrew, or all three—or all one to me—for enough.”

“Enough House,” said I; “that’s a curious name, miss.”

“Yes,” she replied; “but it meant more than it said. It meant, when it was given, that whoever had this house could want nothing else. They must have been easily satisfied in those days, I should think. But don’t loiter, boy.”

Though she called me “boy” so often, and with a carelessness that was far from complimentary, she was of about my own age. She seemed much older than I, of course, being a girl, and beautiful and self-possessed; and she was as scornful of me as if she had been one-and-twenty, and a queen.

We went into the house by a side door, the great front entrance had two chains across it outside,—and the first thing I noticed was, that the passages were all dark, and that she had left a candle burning there. She took it up, and we went through more passages and up a staircase, and still it was all dark, and only the candle lighted us.

At last we came to the door of a room, and she said, “Go in.”

I answered, more in shyness than politeness, “After you, miss.”

To this she returned: “Don’t be ridiculous, boy; I am not going in.” And scornfully walked away, and—what was worse—took the candle with her.

This was very uncomfortable, and I was half afraid. However, the only thing to be done being to knock at the door, I knocked, and was told from within to enter. I entered, therefore, and found myself in a pretty large room, well lighted with wax candles. No glimpse of daylight was to be seen in it. It was a dressing-room, as I supposed from the furniture, though much of it was of forms and uses then quite unknown to me. But prominent in it was a draped table with a gilded looking-glass, and that I made out at first sight to be a fine lady’s dressing-table.

Whether I should have made out this object so soon if there had been no fine lady sitting at it, I cannot say. In an arm-chair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see.

She was dressed in rich materials,—satins, and lace, and silks,—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on,—the other was on the table

near her hand,—her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a Prayer-Book all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass.

It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could.

"Who is it?" said the lady at the table.

"Pip, ma'am."

"Pip?"

"Mr. Pumblechook's boy, ma'am. Come—to play."

"Come nearer; let me look at you. Come close."

It was when I stood before her, avoiding her eyes, that I took note of the surrounding objects in detail, and saw that her watch had stopped at twenty minutes to nine, and that a clock in the room had stopped at twenty minutes to nine.

"Look at me," said Miss Havisham. "You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?"

I regret to state that I was not afraid of telling the enormous lie comprehended in the answer "No."

"Do you know what I touch here?" she said, laying her hands, one upon the other, on her left side.

"Yes, ma'am." (It made me think of the young man.)

"What do I touch?"

"Your heart."

“Broken!”

She uttered the word with an eager look, and with strong emphasis, and with a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it. Afterwards she kept her hands there for a little while, and slowly took them away as if they were heavy.

“I am tired,” said Miss Havisham. “I want diversion, and I have done with men and women. Play.”

I think it will be conceded by my most disputatious reader, that she could hardly have directed an unfortunate boy to do anything in the wide world more difficult to be done under the circumstances.

“I sometimes have sick fancies,” she went on, “and I have a sick fancy that I want to see some play. There, there!” with an impatient movement of the fingers of her right hand; “play, play, play!”

For a moment, with the fear of my sister’s working me before my eyes, I had a desperate idea of starting round the room in the assumed character of Mr. Pumblechook’s chaise-cart. But I felt myself so unequal to the performance that I gave it up, and stood looking at Miss Havisham in what I suppose she took for a dogged manner, inasmuch as she said, when we had taken a good look at each other,—

“Are you sullen and obstinate?”

“No, ma’am, I am very sorry for you, and very sorry I can’t play just now. If you complain of me I shall get into trouble with my sister, so I would do it if I could; but it’s so new here, and so strange, and so fine,—and melancholy—.” I stopped, fearing I might say too much, or had already said it, and we took another look at each other.

Before she spoke again, she turned her eyes from me, and looked at the dress she wore, and at the dressing-table, and finally at herself in the looking-glass.

“So new to him,” she muttered, “so old to me; so strange to him, so familiar to me; so melancholy to both of us! Call Estella.”

As she was still looking at the reflection of herself, I thought she was still talking to herself, and kept quiet.

“Call Estella,” she repeated, flashing a look at me. “You can do that. Call Estella. At the door.”

To stand in the dark in a mysterious passage of an unknown house, bawling Estella to a scornful young lady neither visible nor responsive, and

feeling it a dreadful liberty so to roar out her name, was almost as bad as playing to order. But she answered at last, and her light came along the dark passage like a star.

Miss Havisham beckoned her to come close, and took up a jewel from the table, and tried its effect upon her fair young bosom and against her pretty brown hair. “Your own, one day, my dear, and you will use it well. Let me see you play cards with this boy.”

“With this boy? Why, he is a common laboring boy!”

I thought I overheard Miss Havisham answer,—only it seemed so unlikely,—“Well? You can break his heart.”

“What do you play, boy?” asked Estella of myself, with the greatest disdain.

“Nothing but beggar my neighbor, miss.”

“Beggar him,” said Miss Havisham to Estella. So we sat down to cards.

It was then I began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock, a long time ago. I noticed that Miss Havisham put down the jewel exactly on the spot from which she had taken it up. As Estella dealt the cards, I glanced at the dressing-table again, and saw that the shoe upon it, once white, now yellow, had never been worn. I glanced down at the foot from which the shoe was absent, and saw that the silk stocking on it, once white, now yellow, had been trodden ragged. Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud.

So she sat, corpse-like, as we played at cards; the frillings and trimmings on her bridal dress, looking like earthy paper. I knew nothing then of the discoveries that are occasionally made of bodies buried in ancient times, which fall to powder in the moment of being distinctly seen; but, I have often thought since, that she must have looked as if the admission of the natural light of day would have struck her to dust.

“He calls the knaves Jacks, this boy!” said Estella with disdain, before our first game was out. “And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!”

I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair. Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it.

She won the game, and I dealt. I misdealt, as was only natural, when I knew she was lying in wait for me to do wrong; and she denounced me for a stupid, clumsy laboring-boy.

“You say nothing of her,” remarked Miss Havisham to me, as she looked on. “She says many hard things of you, but you say nothing of her. What do you think of her?”

“I don’t like to say,” I stammered.

“Tell me in my ear,” said Miss Havisham, bending down.

“I think she is very proud,” I replied, in a whisper.

“Anything else?”

“I think she is very pretty.”

“Anything else?”

“I think she is very insulting.” (She was looking at me then with a look of supreme aversion.)

“Anything else?”

“I think I should like to go home.”

“And never see her again, though she is so pretty?”

“I am not sure that I shouldn’t like to see her again, but I should like to go home now.”

“You shall go soon,” said Miss Havisham, aloud. “Play the game out.”

Saving for the one weird smile at first, I should have felt almost sure that Miss Havisham’s face could not smile. It had dropped into a watchful and brooding expression,—most likely when all the things about her had become transfixed,—and it looked as if nothing could ever lift it up again. Her chest had dropped, so that she stooped; and her voice had dropped, so that she spoke low, and with a dead lull upon her; altogether, she had the appearance of having dropped body and soul, within and without, under the weight of a crushing blow.

I played the game to an end with Estella, and she beggared me. She threw the cards down on the table when she had won them all, as if she despised them for having been won of me.

“When shall I have you here again?” said Miss Havisham. “Let me think.”

I was beginning to remind her that to-day was Wednesday, when she checked me with her former impatient movement of the fingers of her right hand.

“There, there! I know nothing of days of the week; I know nothing of weeks of the year. Come again after six days. You hear?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Estella, take him down. Let him have something to eat, and let him roam and look about him while he eats. Go, Pip.”

I followed the candle down, as I had followed the candle up, and she stood it in the place where we had found it. Until she opened the side entrance, I had fancied, without thinking about it, that it must necessarily be night-time. The rush of the daylight quite confounded me, and made me feel as if I had been in the candlelight of the strange room many hours.

“You are to wait here, you boy,” said Estella; and disappeared and closed the door.

I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. My opinion of those accessories was not favorable. They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now, as vulgar appendages. I determined to ask Joe why he had ever taught me to call those picture-cards Jacks, which ought to be called knaves. I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too.

She came back, with some bread and meat and a little mug of beer. She put the mug down on the stones of the yard, and gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace. I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry,—I cannot hit upon the right name for the smart—God knows what its name was,—that tears started to my eyes. The moment they sprang there, the girl looked at me with a quick delight in having been the cause of them. This gave me power to keep them back and to look at her: so, she gave a contemptuous toss—but with a sense, I thought, of having made too sure that I was so wounded—and left me.

But when she was gone, I looked about me for a place to hide my face in, and got behind one of the gates in the brewery-lane, and leaned my sleeve against the wall there, and leaned my forehead on it and cried. As I cried, I kicked the wall, and took a hard twist at my hair; so bitter were my feelings, and so sharp was the smart without a name, that needed counteraction.

My sister’s bringing up had made me sensitive. In the little world in

which children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice. It may be only small injustice that the child can be exposed to; but the child is small, and its world is small, and its rocking-horse stands as many hands high, according to scale, as a big-boned Irish hunter. Within myself, I had sustained, from my babyhood, a perpetual conflict with injustice. I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me. I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing me up by hand gave her no right to bring me up by jerks. Through all my punishments, disgraces, fasts, and vigils, and other penitential performances, I had nursed this assurance; and to my communing so much with it, in a solitary and unprotected way, I in great part refer the fact that I was morally timid and very sensitive.

I got rid of my injured feelings for the time by kicking them into the brewery wall, and twisting them out of my hair, and then I smoothed my face with my sleeve, and came from behind the gate. The bread and meat were acceptable, and the beer was warming and tingling, and I was soon in spirits to look about me.

To be sure, it was a deserted place, down to the pigeon-house in the brewery-yard, which had been blown crooked on its pole by some high wind, and would have made the pigeons think themselves at sea, if there had been any pigeons there to be rocked by it. But there were no pigeons in the dove-cot, no horses in the stable, no pigs in the sty, no malt in the storehouse, no smells of grains and beer in the copper or the vat. All the uses and scents of the brewery might have evaporated with its last reek of smoke. In a by-yard, there was a wilderness of empty casks, which had a certain sour remembrance of better days lingering about them; but it was too sour to be accepted as a sample of the beer that was gone,—and in this respect I remember those recluses as being like most others.

Behind the furthest end of the brewery, was a rank garden with an old wall; not so high but that I could struggle up and hold on long enough to look over it, and see that the rank garden was the garden of the house, and that it was overgrown with tangled weeds, but that there was a track upon the green and yellow paths, as if some one sometimes walked there, and that Estella was walking away from me even then. But she seemed to be everywhere. For when I yielded to the temptation presented by the casks,

and began to walk on them, I saw her walking on them at the end of the yard of casks. She had her back towards me, and held her pretty brown hair spread out in her two hands, and never looked round, and passed out of my view directly. So, in the brewery itself,—by which I mean the large paved lofty place in which they used to make the beer, and where the brewing utensils still were. When I first went into it, and, rather oppressed by its gloom, stood near the door looking about me, I saw her pass among the extinguished fires, and ascend some light iron stairs, and go out by a gallery high overhead, as if she were going out into the sky.

It was in this place, and at this moment, that a strange thing happened to my fancy. I thought it a strange thing then, and I thought it a stranger thing long afterwards. I turned my eyes—a little dimmed by looking up at the frosty light—towards a great wooden beam in a low nook of the building near me on my right hand, and I saw a figure hanging there by the neck. A figure all in yellow white, with but one shoe to the feet; and it hung so, that I could see that the faded trimmings of the dress were like earthy paper, and that the face was Miss Havisham's, with a movement going over the whole countenance as if she were trying to call to me. In the terror of seeing the figure, and in the terror of being certain that it had not been there a moment before, I at first ran from it, and then ran towards it. And my terror was greatest of all when I found no figure there.

Nothing less than the frosty light of the cheerful sky, the sight of people passing beyond the bars of the court-yard gate, and the reviving influence of the rest of the bread and meat and beer, would have brought me round. Even with those aids, I might not have come to myself as soon as I did, but that I saw Estella approaching with the keys, to let me out. She would have some fair reason for looking down upon me, I thought, if she saw me frightened; and she would have no fair reason.

She gave me a triumphant glance in passing me, as if she rejoiced that my hands were so coarse and my boots were so thick, and she opened the gate, and stood holding it. I was passing out without looking at her, when she touched me with a taunting hand.

"Why don't you cry?"

"Because I don't want to."

"You do," said she. "You have been crying till you are half blind, and you are near crying again now."

She laughed contemptuously, pushed me out, and locked the gate upon me. I went straight to Mr. Pumblechook's, and was immensely relieved to find him not at home. So, leaving word with the shopman on what day I was wanted at Miss Havisham's again, I set off on the four-mile walk to our forge; pondering, as I went along, on all I had seen, and deeply revolving that I was a common laboring-boy; that my hands were coarse; that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way.

Chapter IX

WHEN I REACHED HOME, my sister was very curious to know all about Miss Havisham's, and asked a number of questions. And I soon found myself getting heavily bumped from behind in the nape of the neck and the small of the back, and having my face ignominiously shoved against the kitchen wall, because I did not answer those questions at sufficient length.

If a dread of not being understood be hidden in the breasts of other young people to anything like the extent to which it used to be hidden in mine,—which I consider probable, as I have no particular reason to suspect myself of having been a monstrosity,—it is the key to many reservations. I felt convinced that if I described Miss Havisham's as my eyes had seen it, I should not be understood. Not only that, but I felt convinced that Miss Havisham too would not be understood; and although she was perfectly incomprehensible to me, I entertained an impression that there would be something coarse and treacherous in my dragging her as she really was (to say nothing of Miss Estella) before the contemplation of Mrs. Joe. Consequently, I said as little as I could, and had my face shoved against the kitchen wall.

The worst of it was that that bullying old Pumblechook, preyed upon by a devouring curiosity to be informed of all I had seen and heard, came gaping over in his chaise-cart at tea-time, to have the details divulged to him. And the mere sight of the torment, with his fishy eyes and mouth open, his sandy hair inquisitively on end, and his waistcoat heaving with windy arithmetic, made me vicious in my reticence.

"Well, boy," Uncle Pumblechook began, as soon as he was seated in the chair of honor by the fire. "How did you get on up town?"

I answered, "Pretty well, sir," and my sister shook her fist at me.

"Pretty well?" Mr. Pumblechook repeated. "Pretty well is no answer. Tell

us what you mean by pretty well, boy?”

Whitewash on the forehead hardens the brain into a state of obstinacy perhaps. Anyhow, with whitewash from the wall on my forehead, my obstinacy was adamantine. I reflected for some time, and then answered as if I had discovered a new idea, “I mean pretty well.”

My sister with an exclamation of impatience was going to fly at me,—I had no shadow of defence, for Joe was busy in the forge,—when Mr. Pumblechook interposed with “No! Don’t lose your temper. Leave this lad to me, ma’am; leave this lad to me.” Mr. Pumblechook then turned me towards him, as if he were going to cut my hair, and said,—

“First (to get our thoughts in order): Forty-three pence?”

I calculated the consequences of replying “Four Hundred Pound,” and finding them against me, went as near the answer as I could—which was somewhere about eightpence off. Mr. Pumblechook then put me through my pence-table from “twelve pence make one shilling,” up to “forty pence make three and fourpence,” and then triumphantly demanded, as if he had done for me, “Now! How much is forty-three pence?” To which I replied, after a long interval of reflection, “I don’t know.” And I was so aggravated that I almost doubt if I did know.

Mr. Pumblechook worked his head like a screw to screw it out of me, and said, “Is forty-three pence seven and sixpence three fardens, for instance?”

“Yes!” said I. And although my sister instantly boxed my ears, it was highly gratifying to me to see that the answer spoilt his joke, and brought him to a dead stop.

“Boy! What like is Miss Havisham?” Mr. Pumblechook began again when he had recovered; folding his arms tight on his chest and applying the screw.

“Very tall and dark,” I told him.

“Is she, uncle?” asked my sister.

Mr. Pumblechook winked assent; from which I at once inferred that he had never seen Miss Havisham, for she was nothing of the kind.

“Good!” said Mr. Pumblechook conceitedly. (“This is the way to have him! We are beginning to hold our own, I think, Mum?”)

“I am sure, uncle,” returned Mrs. Joe, “I wish you had him always; you know so well how to deal with him.”

“Now, boy! What was she a doing of, when you went in today?” asked Mr. Pumblechook.

“She was sitting,” I answered, “in a black velvet coach.”

Mr. Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe stared at one another—as they well might—and both repeated, “In a black velvet coach?”

“Yes,” said I. “And Miss Estella—that’s her niece, I think—handed her in cake and wine at the coach-window, on a gold plate. And we all had cake and wine on gold plates. And I got up behind the coach to eat mine, because she told me to.”

“Was anybody else there?” asked Mr. Pumblechook.

“Four dogs,” said I.

“Large or small?”

“Immense,” said I. “And they fought for veal-cutlets out of a silver basket.”

Mr. Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe stared at one another again, in utter amazement. I was perfectly frantic,—a reckless witness under the torture,—and would have told them anything.

“Where was this coach, in the name of gracious?” asked my sister.

“In Miss Havisham’s room.” They stared again. “But there weren’t any horses to it.” I added this saving clause, in the moment of rejecting four richly caparisoned coursers which I had had wild thoughts of harnessing.

“Can this be possible, uncle?” asked Mrs. Joe. “What can the boy mean?”

“I’ll tell you, Mum,” said Mr. Pumblechook. “My opinion is, it’s a sedan-chair. She’s flighty, you know,—very flighty,—quite flighty enough to pass her days in a sedan-chair.”

“Did you ever see her in it, uncle?” asked Mrs. Joe.

“How could I,” he returned, forced to the admission, “when I never see her in my life? Never clapped eyes upon her!”

“Goodness, uncle! And yet you have spoken to her?”

“Why, don’t you know,” said Mr. Pumblechook, testily, “that when I have been there, I have been took up to the outside of her door, and the door has stood ajar, and she has spoke to me that way. Don’t say you don’t know that, Mum. Howsever, the boy went there to play. What did you play at, boy?”

“We played with flags,” I said. (I beg to observe that I think of myself

with amazement, when I recall the lies I told on this occasion.)

"Flags!" echoed my sister.

"Yes," said I. "Estella waved a blue flag, and I waved a red one, and Miss Havisham waved one sprinkled all over with little gold stars, out at the coach-window. And then we all waved our swords and hurrahed."

"Swords!" repeated my sister. "Where did you get swords from?"

"Out of a cupboard," said I. "And I saw pistols in it,—and jam,—and pills. And there was no daylight in the room, but it was all lighted up with candles."

"That's true, Mum," said Mr. Pumblechook, with a grave nod. "That's the state of the case, for that much I've seen myself." And then they both stared at me, and I, with an obtrusive show of artlessness on my countenance, stared at them, and plaited the right leg of my trousers with my right hand.

If they had asked me any more questions, I should undoubtedly have betrayed myself, for I was even then on the point of mentioning that there was a balloon in the yard, and should have hazarded the statement but for my invention being divided between that phenomenon and a bear in the brewery. They were so much occupied, however, in discussing the marvels I had already presented for their consideration, that I escaped. The subject still held them when Joe came in from his work to have a cup of tea. To whom my sister, more for the relief of her own mind than for the gratification of his, related my pretended experiences.

Now, when I saw Joe open his blue eyes and roll them all round the kitchen in helpless amazement, I was overtaken by penitence; but only as regarded him,—not in the least as regarded the other two. Towards Joe, and Joe only, I considered myself a young monster, while they sat debating what results would come to me from Miss Havisham's acquaintance and favor. They had no doubt that Miss Havisham would "do something" for me; their doubts related to the form that something would take. My sister stood out for "property." Mr. Pumblechook was in favor of a handsome premium for binding me apprentice to some genteel trade,—say, the corn and seed trade, for instance. Joe fell into the deepest disgrace with both, for offering the bright suggestion that I might only be presented with one of the dogs who had fought for the veal-cutlets. "If a fool's head can't express better opinions than that," said my sister, "and you have got any work to do, you

had better go and do it." So he went.

After Mr. Pumblechook had driven off, and when my sister was washing up, I stole into the forge to Joe, and remained by him until he had done for the night. Then I said, "Before the fire goes out, Joe, I should like to tell you something."

"Should you, Pip?" said Joe, drawing his shoeing-stool near the forge. "Then tell us. What is it, Pip?"

"Joe," said I, taking hold of his rolled-up shirt sleeve, and twisting it between my finger and thumb, "you remember all that about Miss Havisham's?"

"Remember?" said Joe. "I believe you! Wonderful!"

"It's a terrible thing, Joe; it ain't true."

"What are you telling of, Pip?" cried Joe, falling back in the greatest amazement. "You don't mean to say it's—"

"Yes I do; it's lies, Joe."

"But not all of it? Why sure you don't mean to say, Pip, that there was no black welwet co—ch?" For, I stood shaking my head. "But at least there was dogs, Pip? Come, Pip," said Joe, persuasively, "if there warn't no weal-cutlets, at least there was dogs?"

"No, Joe."

"A dog?" said Joe. "A puppy? Come?"

"No, Joe, there was nothing at all of the kind."

As I fixed my eyes hopelessly on Joe, Joe contemplated me in dismay. "Pip, old chap! This won't do, old fellow! I say! Where do you expect to go to?"

"It's terrible, Joe; ain't it?"

"Terrible?" cried Joe. "Awful! What possessed you?"

"I don't know what possessed me, Joe," I replied, letting his shirt sleeve go, and sitting down in the ashes at his feet, hanging my head; "but I wish you hadn't taught me to call Knaves at cards Jacks; and I wish my boots weren't so thick nor my hands so coarse."

And then I told Joe that I felt very miserable, and that I hadn't been able to explain myself to Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook, who were so rude to me, and that there had been a beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's who was dreadfully proud, and that she had said I was common, and that I knew I was common, and that I wished I was not common, and that the lies had

come of it somehow, though I didn’t know how.

This was a case of metaphysics, at least as difficult for Joe to deal with as for me. But Joe took the case altogether out of the region of metaphysics, and by that means vanquished it.

“There’s one thing you may be sure of, Pip,” said Joe, after some rumination, “namely, that lies is lies. Howsever they come, they didn’t ought to come, and they come from the father of lies, and work round to the same. Don’t you tell no more of ’em, Pip. That ain’t the way to get out of being common, old chap. And as to being common, I don’t make it out at all clear. You are oncommon in some things. You’re oncommon small. Likewise you’re a oncommon scholar.”

“No, I am ignorant and backward, Joe.”

“Why, see what a letter you wrote last night! Wrote in print even! I’ve seen letters—Ah! and from gentlefolks!—that I’ll swear weren’t wrote in print,” said Joe.

“I have learnt next to nothing, Joe. You think much of me. It’s only that.”

“Well, Pip,” said Joe, “be it so or be it son’t, you must be a common scholar afore you can be a oncommon one, I should hope! The king upon his throne, with his crown upon his ed, can’t sit and write his acts of Parliament in print, without having begun, when he were a unpromoted Prince, with the alphabet.—Ah!” added Joe, with a shake of the head that was full of meaning, “and begun at A. too, and worked his way to Z. And I know what that is to do, though I can’t say I’ve exactly done it.”

There was some hope in this piece of wisdom, and it rather encouraged me.

“Whether common ones as to callings and earnings,” pursued Joe, reflectively, “mightn’t be the better of continuing for to keep company with common ones, instead of going out to play with oncommon ones,—which reminds me to hope that there were a flag, perhaps?”

“No, Joe.”

“(I’m sorry there weren’t a flag, Pip). Whether that might be or mightn’t be, is a thing as can’t be looked into now, without putting your sister on the Rampage; and that’s a thing not to be thought of as being done intentional. Lookee here, Pip, at what is said to you by a true friend. Which this to you the true friend say. If you can’t get to be oncommon through going straight, you’ll never get to do it through going crooked. So don’t tell no more on

’em, Pip, and live well and die happy.”

“You are not angry with me, Joe?”

“No, old chap. But bearing in mind that them were which I meantersay of a stunning and outdacious sort,—alluding to them which bordered on weal-cutlets and dog-fighting,—a sincere well-wisher would adwise, Pip, their being dropped into your meditations, when you go up stairs to bed. That’s all, old chap, and don’t never do it no more.”

When I got up to my little room and said my prayers, I did not forget Joe’s recommendation, and yet my young mind was in that disturbed and unthankful state, that I thought long after I laid me down, how common Estella would consider Joe, a mere blacksmith; how thick his boots, and how coarse his hands. I thought how Joe and my sister were then sitting in the kitchen, and how I had come up to bed from the kitchen, and how Miss Havisham and Estella never sat in a kitchen, but were far above the level of such common doings. I fell asleep recalling what I “used to do” when I was at Miss Havisham’s; as though I had been there weeks or months, instead of hours; and as though it were quite an old subject of remembrance, instead of one that had arisen only that day.

That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day.

Chapter X

THE FELICITOUS IDEA OCCURRED to me a morning or two later when I woke, that the best step I could take towards making myself uncommon was to get out of Biddy everything she knew. In pursuance of this luminous conception I mentioned to Biddy when I went to Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's at night, that I had a particular reason for wishing to get on in life, and that I should feel very much obliged to her if she would impart all her learning to me. Biddy, who was the most obliging of girls, immediately said she would, and indeed began to carry out her promise within five minutes.

The Educational scheme or Course established by Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt may be resolved into the following synopsis. The pupils ate apples and put straws down one another's backs, until Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt collected her energies, and made an indiscriminate totter at them with a birch-rod. After receiving the charge with every mark of derision, the pupils formed in line and buzzingly passed a ragged book from hand to hand. The book had an alphabet in it, some figures and tables, and a little spelling,—that is to say, it had had once. As soon as this volume began to circulate, Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt fell into a state of coma, arising either from sleep or a rheumatic paroxysm. The pupils then entered among themselves upon a competitive examination on the subject of Boots, with the view of ascertaining who could tread the hardest upon whose toes. This mental exercise lasted until Biddy made a rush at them and distributed three defaced Bibles (shaped as if they had been unskilfully cut off the chump end of something), more illegibly printed at the best than any curiosities of literature I have since met with, speckled all over with ironmould, and having various specimens of the insect world smashed between their leaves. This part of the Course was usually lightened by several single combats between Biddy and refractory students. When the fights were over, Biddy

gave out the number of a page, and then we all read aloud what we could,—or what we couldn't—in a frightful chorus; Biddy leading with a high, shrill, monotonous voice, and none of us having the least notion of, or reverence for, what we were reading about. When this horrible din had lasted a certain time, it mechanically awoke Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, who staggered at a boy fortuitously, and pulled his ears. This was understood to terminate the Course for the evening, and we emerged into the air with shrieks of intellectual victory. It is fair to remark that there was no prohibition against any pupil's entertaining himself with a slate or even with the ink (when there was any), but that it was not easy to pursue that branch of study in the winter season, on account of the little general shop in which the classes were holden—and which was also Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's sitting-room and bedchamber—being but faintly illuminated through the agency of one low-spirited dip-candle and no snuffers.

It appeared to me that it would take time to become uncommon, under these circumstances: nevertheless, I resolved to try it, and that very evening Biddy entered on our special agreement, by imparting some information from her little catalogue of Prices, under the head of moist sugar, and lending me, to copy at home, a large old English D which she had imitated from the heading of some newspaper, and which I supposed, until she told me what it was, to be a design for a buckle.

Of course there was a public-house in the village, and of course Joe liked sometimes to smoke his pipe there. I had received strict orders from my sister to call for him at the Three Jolly Bargemen, that evening, on my way from school, and bring him home at my peril. To the Three Jolly Bargemen, therefore, I directed my steps.

There was a bar at the Jolly Bargemen, with some alarmingly long chalk scores in it on the wall at the side of the door, which seemed to me to be never paid off. They had been there ever since I could remember, and had grown more than I had. But there was a quantity of chalk about our country, and perhaps the people neglected no opportunity of turning it to account.

It being Saturday night, I found the landlord looking rather grimly at these records; but as my business was with Joe and not with him, I merely wished him good evening, and passed into the common room at the end of the passage, where there was a bright large kitchen fire, and where Joe was smoking his pipe in company with Mr. Wopsle and a stranger. Joe greeted

me as usual with “Halloa, Pip, old chap!” and the moment he said that, the stranger turned his head and looked at me.

He was a secret-looking man whom I had never seen before. His head was all on one side, and one of his eyes was half shut up, as if he were taking aim at something with an invisible gun. He had a pipe in his mouth, and he took it out, and, after slowly blowing all his smoke away and looking hard at me all the time, nodded. So, I nodded, and then he nodded again, and made room on the settle beside him that I might sit down there.

But as I was used to sit beside Joe whenever I entered that place of resort, I said “No, thank you, sir,” and fell into the space Joe made for me on the opposite settle. The strange man, after glancing at Joe, and seeing that his attention was otherwise engaged, nodded to me again when I had taken my seat, and then rubbed his leg—in a very odd way, as it struck me.

“You was saying,” said the strange man, turning to Joe, “that you was a blacksmith.”

“Yes. I said it, you know,” said Joe.

“What’ll you drink, Mr.—? You didn’t mention your name, by the bye.”

Joe mentioned it now, and the strange man called him by it. “What’ll you drink, Mr. Gargery? At my expense? To top up with?”

“Well,” said Joe, “to tell you the truth, I ain’t much in the habit of drinking at anybody’s expense but my own.”

“Habit? No,” returned the stranger, “but once and away, and on a Saturday night too. Come! Put a name to it, Mr. Gargery.”

“I wouldn’t wish to be stiff company,” said Joe. “Rum.”

“Rum,” repeated the stranger. “And will the other gentleman originate a sentiment.”

“Rum,” said Mr. Wopsle.

“Three Rums!” cried the stranger, calling to the landlord. “Glasses round!”

“This other gentleman,” observed Joe, by way of introducing Mr. Wopsle, “is a gentleman that you would like to hear give it out. Our clerk at church.”

“Aha!” said the stranger, quickly, and cocking his eye at me. “The lonely church, right out on the marshes, with graves round it!”

“That’s it,” said Joe.

The stranger, with a comfortable kind of grunt over his pipe, put his legs

up on the settle that he had to himself. He wore a flapping broad-brimmed traveller's hat, and under it a handkerchief tied over his head in the manner of a cap: so that he showed no hair. As he looked at the fire, I thought I saw a cunning expression, followed by a half-laugh, come into his face.

"I am not acquainted with this country, gentlemen, but it seems a solitary country towards the river."

"Most marshes is solitary," said Joe.

"No doubt, no doubt. Do you find any gypsies, now, or tramps, or vagrants of any sort, out there?"

"No," said Joe; "none but a runaway convict now and then. And we don't find them, easy. Eh, Mr. Wopsle?"

Mr. Wopsle, with a majestic remembrance of old discomfiture, assented; but not warmly.

"Seems you have been out after such?" asked the stranger.

"Once," returned Joe. "Not that we wanted to take them, you understand; we went out as lookers on; me, and Mr. Wopsle, and Pip. Didn't us, Pip?"

"Yes, Joe."

The stranger looked at me again,—still cocking his eye, as if he were expressly taking aim at me with his invisible gun,—and said, "He's a likely young parcel of bones that. What is it you call him?"

"Pip," said Joe.

"Christened Pip?"

"No, not christened Pip."

"Surname Pip?"

"No," said Joe, "it's a kind of family name what he gave himself when a infant, and is called by."

"Son of yours?"

"Well," said Joe, meditatively, not, of course, that it could be in anywise necessary to consider about it, but because it was the way at the Jolly Bargemen to seem to consider deeply about everything that was discussed over pipes,—"well—no. No, he ain't."

"Nevvy?" said the strange man.

"Well," said Joe, with the same appearance of profound cogitation, "he is not—no, not to deceive you, he is not—my nevvy."

"What the Blue Blazes is he?" asked the stranger. Which appeared to me to be an inquiry of unnecessary strength.

Mr. Wopsle struck in upon that; as one who knew all about relationships, having professional occasion to bear in mind what female relations a man might not marry; and expounded the ties between me and Joe. Having his hand in, Mr. Wopsle finished off with a most terrifically snarling passage from Richard the Third, and seemed to think he had done quite enough to account for it when he added, "—as the poet says."

And here I may remark that when Mr. Wopsle referred to me, he considered it a necessary part of such reference to rumple my hair and poke it into my eyes. I cannot conceive why everybody of his standing who visited at our house should always have put me through the same inflammatory process under similar circumstances. Yet I do not call to mind that I was ever in my earlier youth the subject of remark in our social family circle, but some large-handed person took some such ophthalmic steps to patronize me.

All this while, the strange man looked at nobody but me, and looked at me as if he were determined to have a shot at me at last, and bring me down. But he said nothing after offering his Blue Blazes observation, until the glasses of rum and water were brought; and then he made his shot, and a most extraordinary shot it was.

It was not a verbal remark, but a proceeding in dumb-show, and was pointedly addressed to me. He stirred his rum and water pointedly at me, and he tasted his rum and water pointedly at me. And he stirred it and he tasted it; not with a spoon that was brought to him, but with a file.

He did this so that nobody but I saw the file; and when he had done it he wiped the file and put it in a breast-pocket. I knew it to be Joe's file, and I knew that he knew my convict, the moment I saw the instrument. I sat gazing at him, spell-bound. But he now reclined on his settle, taking very little notice of me, and talking principally about turnips.

There was a delicious sense of cleaning-up and making a quiet pause before going on in life afresh, in our village on Saturday nights, which stimulated Joe to dare to stay out half an hour longer on Saturdays than at other times. The half-hour and the rum and water running out together, Joe got up to go, and took me by the hand.

"Stop half a moment, Mr. Gargery," said the strange man. "I think I've got a bright new shilling somewhere in my pocket, and if I have, the boy shall have it."

He looked it out from a handful of small change, folded it in some crumpled paper, and gave it to me. “Yours!” said he. “Mind! Your own.”

I thanked him, staring at him far beyond the bounds of good manners, and holding tight to Joe. He gave Joe good-night, and he gave Mr. Wopsle good-night (who went out with us), and he gave me only a look with his aiming eye,—no, not a look, for he shut it up, but wonders may be done with an eye by hiding it.

On the way home, if I had been in a humor for talking, the talk must have been all on my side, for Mr. Wopsle parted from us at the door of the Jolly Bargemen, and Joe went all the way home with his mouth wide open, to rinse the rum out with as much air as possible. But I was in a manner stupefied by this turning up of my old misdeed and old acquaintance, and could think of nothing else.

My sister was not in a very bad temper when we presented ourselves in the kitchen, and Joe was encouraged by that unusual circumstance to tell her about the bright shilling. “A bad un, I’ll be bound,” said Mrs. Joe triumphantly, “or he wouldn’t have given it to the boy! Let’s look at it.”

I took it out of the paper, and it proved to be a good one. “But what’s this?” said Mrs. Joe, throwing down the shilling and catching up the paper. “Two One-Pound notes?”

Nothing less than two fat sweltering one-pound notes that seemed to have been on terms of the warmest intimacy with all the cattle-markets in the county. Joe caught up his hat again, and ran with them to the Jolly Bargemen to restore them to their owner. While he was gone, I sat down on my usual stool and looked vacantly at my sister, feeling pretty sure that the man would not be there.

Presently, Joe came back, saying that the man was gone, but that he, Joe, had left word at the Three Jolly Bargemen concerning the notes. Then my sister sealed them up in a piece of paper, and put them under some dried rose-leaves in an ornamental teapot on the top of a press in the state parlor. There they remained, a nightmare to me, many and many a night and day.

I had sadly broken sleep when I got to bed, through thinking of the strange man taking aim at me with his invisible gun, and of the guiltily coarse and common thing it was, to be on secret terms of conspiracy with convicts,—a feature in my low career that I had previously forgotten. I was haunted by the file too. A dread possessed me that when I least expected it,

the file would reappear. I coaxed myself to sleep by thinking of Miss Havisham's, next Wednesday; and in my sleep I saw the file coming at me out of a door, without seeing who held it, and I screamed myself awake.

Chapter XI

AT THE APPOINTED TIME I returned to Miss Havisham's, and my hesitating ring at the gate brought out Estella. She locked it after admitting me, as she had done before, and again preceded me into the dark passage where her candle stood. She took no notice of me until she had the candle in her hand, when she looked over her shoulder, superciliously saying, "You are to come this way to-day," and took me to quite another part of the house.

The passage was a long one, and seemed to pervade the whole square basement of the Manor House. We traversed but one side of the square, however, and at the end of it she stopped, and put her candle down and opened a door. Here, the daylight reappeared, and I found myself in a small paved courtyard, the opposite side of which was formed by a detached dwelling-house, that looked as if it had once belonged to the manager or head clerk of the extinct brewery. There was a clock in the outer wall of this house. Like the clock in Miss Havisham's room, and like Miss Havisham's watch, it had stopped at twenty minutes to nine.

We went in at the door, which stood open, and into a gloomy room with a low ceiling, on the ground-floor at the back. There was some company in the room, and Estella said to me as she joined it, "You are to go and stand there boy, till you are wanted." "There", being the window, I crossed to it, and stood "there," in a very uncomfortable state of mind, looking out.

It opened to the ground, and looked into a most miserable corner of the neglected garden, upon a rank ruin of cabbage-stalks, and one box-tree that had been clipped round long ago, like a pudding, and had a new growth at the top of it, out of shape and of a different color, as if that part of the pudding had stuck to the saucepan and got burnt. This was my homely thought, as I contemplated the box-tree. There had been some light snow, overnight, and it lay nowhere else to my knowledge; but, it had not quite

melted from the cold shadow of this bit of garden, and the wind caught it up in little eddies and threw it at the window, as if it pelted me for coming there.

I divined that my coming had stopped conversation in the room, and that its other occupants were looking at me. I could see nothing of the room except the shining of the fire in the window-glass, but I stiffened in all my joints with the consciousness that I was under close inspection.

There were three ladies in the room and one gentleman. Before I had been standing at the window five minutes, they somehow conveyed to me that they were all toadies and humbugs, but that each of them pretended not to know that the others were toadies and humbugs: because the admission that he or she did know it, would have made him or her out to be a toady and humbug.

They all had a listless and dreary air of waiting somebody's pleasure, and the most talkative of the ladies had to speak quite rigidly to repress a yawn. This lady, whose name was Camilla, very much reminded me of my sister, with the difference that she was older, and (as I found when I caught sight of her) of a blunter cast of features. Indeed, when I knew her better I began to think it was a Mercy she had any features at all, so very blank and high was the dead wall of her face.

"Poor dear soul!" said this lady, with an abruptness of manner quite my sister's. "Nobody's enemy but his own!"

"It would be much more commendable to be somebody else's enemy," said the gentleman; "far more natural."

"Cousin Raymond," observed another lady, "we are to love our neighbor."

"Sarah Pocket," returned Cousin Raymond, "if a man is not his own neighbor, who is?"

Miss Pocket laughed, and Camilla laughed and said (checking a yawn), "The idea!" But I thought they seemed to think it rather a good idea too. The other lady, who had not spoken yet, said gravely and emphatically, "Very true!"

"Poor soul!" Camilla presently went on (I knew they had all been looking at me in the mean time), "he is so very strange! Would anyone believe that when Tom's wife died, he actually could not be induced to see the importance of the children's having the deepest of trimmings to their

mourning? ‘Good Lord!’ says he, ‘Camilla, what can it signify so long as the poor bereaved little things are in black?’ So like Matthew! The idea!”

“Good points in him, good points in him,” said Cousin Raymond; “Heaven forbid I should deny good points in him; but he never had, and he never will have, any sense of the proprieties.”

“You know I was obliged,” said Camilla,—“I was obliged to be firm. I said, ‘It *will not do*, for the credit of the family.’ I told him that, without deep trimmings, the family was disgraced. I cried about it from breakfast till dinner. I injured my digestion. And at last he flung out in his violent way, and said, with a D, ‘Then do as you like.’ Thank Goodness it will always be a consolation to me to know that I instantly went out in a pouring rain and bought the things.”

“He paid for them, did he not?” asked Estella.

“It’s not the question, my dear child, who paid for them,” returned Camilla. “I bought them. And I shall often think of that with peace, when I wake up in the night.”

The ringing of a distant bell, combined with the echoing of some cry or call along the passage by which I had come, interrupted the conversation and caused Estella to say to me, “Now, boy!” On my turning round, they all looked at me with the utmost contempt, and, as I went out, I heard Sarah Pocket say, “Well I am sure! What next!” and Camilla add, with indignation, “Was there ever such a fancy! The i-de-a!”

As we were going with our candle along the dark passage, Estella stopped all of a sudden, and, facing round, said in her taunting manner, with her face quite close to mine,—

“Well?”

“Well, miss?” I answered, almost falling over her and checking myself.

She stood looking at me, and, of course, I stood looking at her.

“Am I pretty?”

“Yes; I think you are very pretty.”

“Am I insulting?”

“Not so much so as you were last time,” said I.

“Not so much so?”

“No.”

She fired when she asked the last question, and she slapped my face with such force as she had, when I answered it.

“Now?” said she. “You little coarse monster, what do you think of me now?”

“I shall not tell you.”

“Because you are going to tell up stairs. Is that it?”

“No,” said I, “that’s not it.”

“Why don’t you cry again, you little wretch?”

“Because I’ll never cry for you again,” said I. Which was, I suppose, as false a declaration as ever was made; for I was inwardly crying for her then, and I know what I know of the pain she cost me afterwards.

We went on our way up stairs after this episode; and, as we were going up, we met a gentleman groping his way down.

“Whom have we here?” asked the gentleman, stopping and looking at me.

“A boy,” said Estella.

He was a burly man of an exceedingly dark complexion, with an exceedingly large head, and a corresponding large hand. He took my chin in his large hand and turned up my face to have a look at me by the light of the candle. He was prematurely bald on the top of his head, and had bushy black eyebrows that wouldn’t lie down but stood up bristling. His eyes were set very deep in his head, and were disagreeably sharp and suspicious. He had a large watch-chain, and strong black dots where his beard and whiskers would have been if he had let them. He was nothing to me, and I could have had no foresight then, that he ever would be anything to me, but it happened that I had this opportunity of observing him well.

“Boy of the neighborhood? Hey?” said he.

“Yes, sir,” said I.

“How do you come here?”

“Miss Havisham sent for me, sir,” I explained.

“Well! Behave yourself. I have a pretty large experience of boys, and you’re a bad set of fellows. Now mind!” said he, biting the side of his great forefinger as he frowned at me, “you behave yourself!”

With those words, he released me—which I was glad of, for his hand smelt of scented soap—and went his way down stairs. I wondered whether he could be a doctor; but no, I thought; he couldn’t be a doctor, or he would have a quieter and more persuasive manner. There was not much time to consider the subject, for we were soon in Miss Havisham’s room, where she

and everything else were just as I had left them. Estella left me standing near the door, and I stood there until Miss Havisham cast her eyes upon me from the dressing-table.

"So!" she said, without being startled or surprised: "the days have worn away, have they?"

"Yes, ma'am. To-day is—"

"There, there, there!" with the impatient movement of her fingers. "I don't want to know. Are you ready to play?"

I was obliged to answer in some confusion, "I don't think I am, ma'am."

"Not at cards again?" she demanded, with a searching look.

"Yes, ma'am; I could do that, if I was wanted."

"Since this house strikes you old and grave, boy," said Miss Havisham, impatiently, "and you are unwilling to play, are you willing to work?"

I could answer this inquiry with a better heart than I had been able to find for the other question, and I said I was quite willing.

"Then go into that opposite room," said she, pointing at the door behind me with her withered hand, "and wait there till I come."

I crossed the staircase landing, and entered the room she indicated. From that room, too, the daylight was completely excluded, and it had an airless smell that was oppressive. A fire had been lately kindled in the damp old-fashioned grate, and it was more disposed to go out than to burn up, and the reluctant smoke which hung in the room seemed colder than the clearer air, —like our own marsh mist. Certain wintry branches of candles on the high chimney-piece faintly lighted the chamber; or it would be more expressive to say, faintly troubled its darkness. It was spacious, and I dare say had once been handsome, but every discernible thing in it was covered with dust and mould, and dropping to pieces. The most prominent object was a long table with a tablecloth spread on it, as if a feast had been in preparation when the house and the clocks all stopped together. An epergne or centre-piece of some kind was in the middle of this cloth; it was so heavily overhung with cobwebs that its form was quite undistinguishable; and, as I looked along the yellow expanse out of which I remember its seeming to grow, like a black fungus, I saw speckle-legged spiders with blotchy bodies running home to it, and running out from it, as if some circumstances of the greatest public importance had just transpired in the spider community.

I heard the mice too, rattling behind the panels, as if the same occurrence

were important to their interests. But the black beetles took no notice of the agitation, and groped about the hearth in a ponderous elderly way, as if they were short-sighted and hard of hearing, and not on terms with one another.

These crawling things had fascinated my attention, and I was watching them from a distance, when Miss Havisham laid a hand upon my shoulder. In her other hand she had a crutch-headed stick on which she leaned, and she looked like the Witch of the place.

"This," said she, pointing to the long table with her stick, "is where I will be laid when I am dead. They shall come and look at me here."

With some vague misgiving that she might get upon the table then and there and die at once, the complete realization of the ghastly waxwork at the Fair, I shrank under her touch.

"What do you think that is?" she asked me, again pointing with her stick; "that, where those cobwebs are?"

"I can't guess what it is, ma'am."

"It's a great cake. A bride-cake. Mine!"

She looked all round the room in a glaring manner, and then said, leaning on me while her hand twitched my shoulder, "Come, come, come! Walk me, walk me!"

I made out from this, that the work I had to do, was to walk Miss Havisham round and round the room. Accordingly, I started at once, and she leaned upon my shoulder, and we went away at a pace that might have been an imitation (founded on my first impulse under that roof) of Mr. Pumblechook's chaise-cart.

She was not physically strong, and after a little time said, "Slower!" Still, we went at an impatient fitful speed, and as we went, she twitched the hand upon my shoulder, and worked her mouth, and led me to believe that we were going fast because her thoughts went fast. After a while she said, "Call Estella!" so I went out on the landing and roared that name as I had done on the previous occasion. When her light appeared, I returned to Miss Havisham, and we started away again round and round the room.

If only Estella had come to be a spectator of our proceedings, I should have felt sufficiently discontented; but as she brought with her the three ladies and the gentleman whom I had seen below, I didn't know what to do. In my politeness, I would have stopped; but Miss Havisham twitched my shoulder, and we posted on,—with a shame-faced consciousness on my part

that they would think it was all my doing.

“Dear Miss Havisham,” said Miss Sarah Pocket. “How well you look!”

“I do not,” returned Miss Havisham. “I am yellow skin and bone.”

Camilla brightened when Miss Pocket met with this rebuff; and she murmured, as she plaintively contemplated Miss Havisham, “Poor dear soul! Certainly not to be expected to look well, poor thing. The idea!”

“And how are you?” said Miss Havisham to Camilla. As we were close to Camilla then, I would have stopped as a matter of course, only Miss Havisham wouldn’t stop. We swept on, and I felt that I was highly obnoxious to Camilla.

“Thank you, Miss Havisham,” she returned, “I am as well as can be expected.”

“Why, what’s the matter with you?” asked Miss Havisham, with exceeding sharpness.

“Nothing worth mentioning,” replied Camilla. “I don’t wish to make a display of my feelings, but I have habitually thought of you more in the night than I am quite equal to.”

“Then don’t think of me,” retorted Miss Havisham.

“Very easily said!” remarked Camilla, amiably repressing a sob, while a hitch came into her upper lip, and her tears overflowed. “Raymond is a witness what ginger and sal volatile I am obliged to take in the night. Raymond is a witness what nervous jerkings I have in my legs. Chokings and nervous jerkings, however, are nothing new to me when I think with anxiety of those I love. If I could be less affectionate and sensitive, I should have a better digestion and an iron set of nerves. I am sure I wish it could be so. But as to not thinking of you in the night—The idea!” Here, a burst of tears.

The Raymond referred to, I understood to be the gentleman present, and him I understood to be Mr. Camilla. He came to the rescue at this point, and said in a consolatory and complimentary voice, “Camilla, my dear, it is well known that your family feelings are gradually undermining you to the extent of making one of your legs shorter than the other.”

“I am not aware,” observed the grave lady whose voice I had heard but once, “that to think of any person is to make a great claim upon that person, my dear.”

Miss Sarah Pocket, whom I now saw to be a little dry, brown, corrugated

old woman, with a small face that might have been made of walnut-shells, and a large mouth like a cat's without the whiskers, supported this position by saying, "No, indeed, my dear. Hem!"

"Thinking is easy enough," said the grave lady.

"What is easier, you know?" assented Miss Sarah Pocket.

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Camilla, whose fermenting feelings appeared to rise from her legs to her bosom. "It's all very true! It's a weakness to be so affectionate, but I can't help it. No doubt my health would be much better if it was otherwise, still I wouldn't change my disposition if I could. It's the cause of much suffering, but it's a consolation to know I possess it, when I wake up in the night." Here another burst of feeling.

Miss Havisham and I had never stopped all this time, but kept going round and round the room; now brushing against the skirts of the visitors, now giving them the whole length of the dismal chamber.

"There's Matthew!" said Camilla. "Never mixing with any natural ties, never coming here to see how Miss Havisham is! I have taken to the sofa with my staylace cut, and have lain there hours insensible, with my head over the side, and my hair all down, and my feet I don't know where—"

("Much higher than your head, my love," said Mr. Camilla.)

"I have gone off into that state, hours and hours, on account of Matthew's strange and inexplicable conduct, and nobody has thanked me."

"Really I must say I should think not!" interposed the grave lady.

"You see, my dear," added Miss Sarah Pocket (a blandly vicious personage), "the question to put to yourself is, who did you expect to thank you, my love?"

"Without expecting any thanks, or anything of the sort," resumed Camilla, "I have remained in that state, hours and hours, and Raymond is a witness of the extent to which I have choked, and what the total inefficacy of ginger has been, and I have been heard at the piano-forte tuner's across the street, where the poor mistaken children have even supposed it to be pigeons cooing at a distance,—and now to be told—" Here Camilla put her hand to her throat, and began to be quite chemical as to the formation of new combinations there.

When this same Matthew was mentioned, Miss Havisham stopped me and herself, and stood looking at the speaker. This change had a great influence in bringing Camilla's chemistry to a sudden end.

“Matthew will come and see me at last,” said Miss Havisham, sternly, “when I am laid on that table. That will be his place,—there,” striking the table with her stick, “at my head! And yours will be there! And your husband’s there! And Sarah Pocket’s there! And Georgiana’s there! Now you all know where to take your stations when you come to feast upon me. And now go!”

At the mention of each name, she had struck the table with her stick in a new place. She now said, “Walk me, walk me!” and we went on again.

“I suppose there’s nothing to be done,” exclaimed Camilla, “but comply and depart. It’s something to have seen the object of one’s love and duty for even so short a time. I shall think of it with a melancholy satisfaction when I wake up in the night. I wish Matthew could have that comfort, but he sets it at defiance. I am determined not to make a display of my feelings, but it’s very hard to be told one wants to feast on one’s relations,—as if one was a Giant,—and to be told to go. The bare idea!”

Mr. Camilla interposing, as Mrs. Camilla laid her hand upon her heaving bosom, that lady assumed an unnatural fortitude of manner which I supposed to be expressive of an intention to drop and choke when out of view, and kissing her hand to Miss Havisham, was escorted forth. Sarah Pocket and Georgiana contended who should remain last; but Sarah was too knowing to be outdone, and ambled round Georgiana with that artful slipperiness that the latter was obliged to take precedence. Sarah Pocket then made her separate effect of departing with, “Bless you, Miss Havisham dear!” and with a smile of forgiving pity on her walnut-shell countenance for the weaknesses of the rest.

While Estella was away lighting them down, Miss Havisham still walked with her hand on my shoulder, but more and more slowly. At last she stopped before the fire, and said, after muttering and looking at it some seconds,—

“This is my birthday, Pip.”

I was going to wish her many happy returns, when she lifted her stick.

“I don’t suffer it to be spoken of. I don’t suffer those who were here just now, or any one to speak of it. They come here on the day, but they dare not refer to it.”

Of course I made no further effort to refer to it.

“On this day of the year, long before you were born, this heap of decay,”

stabbing with her crutched stick at the pile of cobwebs on the table, but not touching it, “was brought here. It and I have worn away together. The mice have gnawed at it, and sharper teeth than teeth of mice have gnawed at me.”

She held the head of her stick against her heart as she stood looking at the table; she in her once white dress, all yellow and withered; the once white cloth all yellow and withered; everything around in a state to crumble under a touch.

“When the ruin is complete,” said she, with a ghastly look, “and when they lay me dead, in my bride’s dress on the bride’s table,—which shall be done, and which will be the finished curse upon him,—so much the better if it is done on this day!”

She stood looking at the table as if she stood looking at her own figure lying there. I remained quiet. Estella returned, and she too remained quiet. It seemed to me that we continued thus for a long time. In the heavy air of the room, and the heavy darkness that brooded in its remoter corners, I even had an alarming fancy that Estella and I might presently begin to decay.

At length, not coming out of her distraught state by degrees, but in an instant, Miss Havisham said, “Let me see you two play cards; why have you not begun?” With that, we returned to her room, and sat down as before; I was beggared, as before; and again, as before, Miss Havisham watched us all the time, directed my attention to Estella’s beauty, and made me notice it the more by trying her jewels on Estella’s breast and hair.

Estella, for her part, likewise treated me as before, except that she did not condescend to speak. When we had played some half-dozen games, a day was appointed for my return, and I was taken down into the yard to be fed in the former dog-like manner. There, too, I was again left to wander about as I liked.

It is not much to the purpose whether a gate in that garden wall which I had scrambled up to peep over on the last occasion was, on that last occasion, open or shut. Enough that I saw no gate then, and that I saw one now. As it stood open, and as I knew that Estella had let the visitors out,—for she had returned with the keys in her hand,—I strolled into the garden, and strolled all over it. It was quite a wilderness, and there were old melon-frames and cucumber-frames in it, which seemed in their decline to have produced a spontaneous growth of weak attempts at pieces of old hats and boots, with now and then a weedy offshoot into the likeness of a battered

saucepan.

When I had exhausted the garden and a greenhouse with nothing in it but a fallen-down grape-vine and some bottles, I found myself in the dismal corner upon which I had looked out of the window. Never questioning for a moment that the house was now empty, I looked in at another window, and found myself, to my great surprise, exchanging a broad stare with a pale young gentleman with red eyelids and light hair.

This pale young gentleman quickly disappeared, and reappeared beside me. He had been at his books when I had found myself staring at him, and I now saw that he was inky.

"Halloa!" said he, "young fellow!"

Halloa being a general observation which I had usually observed to be best answered by itself, I said, "Halloa!" politely omitting young fellow.

"Who let you in?" said he.

"Miss Estella."

"Who gave you leave to prowl about?"

"Miss Estella."

"Come and fight," said the pale young gentleman.

What could I do but follow him? I have often asked myself the question since; but what else could I do? His manner was so final, and I was so astonished, that I followed where he led, as if I had been under a spell.

"Stop a minute, though," he said, wheeling round before we had gone many paces. "I ought to give you a reason for fighting, too. There it is!" In a most irritating manner he instantly slapped his hands against one another, daintily flung one of his legs up behind him, pulled my hair, slapped his hands again, dipped his head, and butted it into my stomach.

The bull-like proceeding last mentioned, besides that it was unquestionably to be regarded in the light of a liberty, was particularly disagreeable just after bread and meat. I therefore hit out at him and was going to hit out again, when he said, "Aha! Would you?" and began dancing backwards and forwards in a manner quite unparalleled within my limited experience.

"Laws of the game!" said he. Here, he skipped from his left leg on to his right. "Regular rules!" Here, he skipped from his right leg on to his left. "Come to the ground, and go through the preliminaries!" Here, he dodged backwards and forwards, and did all sorts of things while I looked

helplessly at him.

I was secretly afraid of him when I saw him so dexterous; but I felt morally and physically convinced that his light head of hair could have had no business in the pit of my stomach, and that I had a right to consider it irrelevant when so obtruded on my attention. Therefore, I followed him without a word, to a retired nook of the garden, formed by the junction of two walls and screened by some rubbish. On his asking me if I was satisfied with the ground, and on my replying Yes, he begged my leave to absent himself for a moment, and quickly returned with a bottle of water and a sponge dipped in vinegar. “Available for both,” he said, placing these against the wall. And then fell to pulling off, not only his jacket and waistcoat, but his shirt too, in a manner at once light-hearted, business-like, and bloodthirsty.

Although he did not look very healthy,—having pimples on his face, and a breaking out at his mouth,—these dreadful preparations quite appalled me. I judged him to be about my own age, but he was much taller, and he had a way of spinning himself about that was full of appearance. For the rest, he was a young gentleman in a gray suit (when not denuded for battle), with his elbows, knees, wrists, and heels considerably in advance of the rest of him as to development.

My heart failed me when I saw him squaring at me with every demonstration of mechanical nicety, and eyeing my anatomy as if he were minutely choosing his bone. I never have been so surprised in my life, as I was when I let out the first blow, and saw him lying on his back, looking up at me with a bloody nose and his face exceedingly fore-shortened.

But, he was on his feet directly, and after sponging himself with a great show of dexterity began squaring again. The second greatest surprise I have ever had in my life was seeing him on his back again, looking up at me out of a black eye.

His spirit inspired me with great respect. He seemed to have no strength, and he never once hit me hard, and he was always knocked down; but he would be up again in a moment, sponging himself or drinking out of the water-bottle, with the greatest satisfaction in seconding himself according to form, and then came at me with an air and a show that made me believe he really was going to do for me at last. He got heavily bruised, for I am sorry to record that the more I hit him, the harder I hit him; but he came up again

and again and again, until at last he got a bad fall with the back of his head against the wall. Even after that crisis in our affairs, he got up and turned round and round confusedly a few times, not knowing where I was; but finally went on his knees to his sponge and threw it up: at the same time panting out, “That means you have won.”

He seemed so brave and innocent, that although I had not proposed the contest, I felt but a gloomy satisfaction in my victory. Indeed, I go so far as to hope that I regarded myself while dressing as a species of savage young wolf or other wild beast. However, I got dressed, darkly wiping my sanguinary face at intervals, and I said, “Can I help you?” and he said “No thankee,” and I said “Good afternoon,” and he said “Same to you.”

When I got into the courtyard, I found Estella waiting with the keys. But she neither asked me where I had been, nor why I had kept her waiting; and there was a bright flush upon her face, as though something had happened to delight her. Instead of going straight to the gate, too, she stepped back into the passage, and beckoned me.

“Come here! You may kiss me, if you like.”

I kissed her cheek as she turned it to me. I think I would have gone through a great deal to kiss her cheek. But I felt that the kiss was given to the coarse common boy as a piece of money might have been, and that it was worth nothing.

What with the birthday visitors, and what with the cards, and what with the fight, my stay had lasted so long, that when I neared home the light on the spit of sand off the point on the marshes was gleaming against a black night-sky, and Joe’s furnace was flinging a path of fire across the road.

Chapter XII

MY MIND GREW VERY uneasy on the subject of the pale young gentleman. The more I thought of the fight, and recalled the pale young gentleman on his back in various stages of puffy and incrimsoned countenance, the more certain it appeared that something would be done to me. I felt that the pale young gentleman's blood was on my head, and that the Law would avenge it. Without having any definite idea of the penalties I had incurred, it was clear to me that village boys could not go stalking about the country, ravaging the houses of gentlefolks and pitching into the studious youth of England, without laying themselves open to severe punishment. For some days, I even kept close at home, and looked out at the kitchen door with the greatest caution and trepidation before going on an errand, lest the officers of the County Jail should pounce upon me. The pale young gentleman's nose had stained my trousers, and I tried to wash out that evidence of my guilt in the dead of night. I had cut my knuckles against the pale young gentleman's teeth, and I twisted my imagination into a thousand tangles, as I devised incredible ways of accounting for that damnatory circumstance when I should be haled before the Judges.

When the day came round for my return to the scene of the deed of violence, my terrors reached their height. Whether myrmidons of Justice, specially sent down from London, would be lying in ambush behind the gate;—whether Miss Havisham, preferring to take personal vengeance for an outrage done to her house, might rise in those grave-clothes of hers, draw a pistol, and shoot me dead:—whether suborned boys—a numerous band of mercenaries—might be engaged to fall upon me in the brewery, and cuff me until I was no more;—it was high testimony to my confidence in the spirit of the pale young gentleman, that I never imagined him accessory to these retaliations; they always came into my mind as the acts of

injudicious relatives of his, goaded on by the state of his visage and an indignant sympathy with the family features.

However, go to Miss Havisham's I must, and go I did. And behold! nothing came of the late struggle. It was not alluded to in any way, and no pale young gentleman was to be discovered on the premises. I found the same gate open, and I explored the garden, and even looked in at the windows of the detached house; but my view was suddenly stopped by the closed shutters within, and all was lifeless. Only in the corner where the combat had taken place could I detect any evidence of the young gentleman's existence. There were traces of his gore in that spot, and I covered them with garden-mould from the eye of man.

On the broad landing between Miss Havisham's own room and that other room in which the long table was laid out, I saw a garden-chair,—a light chair on wheels, that you pushed from behind. It had been placed there since my last visit, and I entered, that same day, on a regular occupation of pushing Miss Havisham in this chair (when she was tired of walking with her hand upon my shoulder) round her own room, and across the landing, and round the other room. Over and over and over again, we would make these journeys, and sometimes they would last as long as three hours at a stretch. I insensibly fall into a general mention of these journeys as numerous, because it was at once settled that I should return every alternate day at noon for these purposes, and because I am now going to sum up a period of at least eight or ten months.

As we began to be more used to one another, Miss Havisham talked more to me, and asked me such questions as what had I learnt and what was I going to be? I told her I was going to be apprenticed to Joe, I believed; and I enlarged upon my knowing nothing and wanting to know everything, in the hope that she might offer some help towards that desirable end. But she did not; on the contrary, she seemed to prefer my being ignorant. Neither did she ever give me any money,—or anything but my daily dinner,—nor ever stipulate that I should be paid for my services.

Estella was always about, and always let me in and out, but never told me I might kiss her again. Sometimes, she would coldly tolerate me; sometimes, she would condescend to me; sometimes, she would be quite familiar with me; sometimes, she would tell me energetically that she hated me. Miss Havisham would often ask me in a whisper, or when we were

alone, “Does she grow prettier and prettier, Pip?” And when I said yes (for indeed she did), would seem to enjoy it greedily. Also, when we played at cards Miss Havisham would look on, with a miserly relish of Estella’s moods, whatever they were. And sometimes, when her moods were so many and so contradictory of one another that I was puzzled what to say or do, Miss Havisham would embrace her with lavish fondness, murmuring something in her ear that sounded like “Break their hearts my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!”

There was a song Joe used to hum fragments of at the forge, of which the burden was Old Clem. This was not a very ceremonious way of rendering homage to a patron saint, but I believe Old Clem stood in that relation towards smiths. It was a song that imitated the measure of beating upon iron, and was a mere lyrical excuse for the introduction of Old Clem’s respected name. Thus, you were to hammer boys round—Old Clem! With a thump and a sound—Old Clem! Beat it out, beat it out—Old Clem! With a clink for the stout—Old Clem! Blow the fire, blow the fire—Old Clem! Roaring dryer, soaring higher—Old Clem! One day soon after the appearance of the chair, Miss Havisham suddenly saying to me, with the impatient movement of her fingers, “There, there, there! Sing!” I was surprised into crooning this ditty as I pushed her over the floor. It happened so to catch her fancy that she took it up in a low brooding voice as if she were singing in her sleep. After that, it became customary with us to have it as we moved about, and Estella would often join in; though the whole strain was so subdued, even when there were three of us, that it made less noise in the grim old house than the lightest breath of wind.

What could I become with these surroundings? How could my character fail to be influenced by them? Is it to be wondered at if my thoughts were dazed, as my eyes were, when I came out into the natural light from the misty yellow rooms?

Perhaps I might have told Joe about the pale young gentleman, if I had not previously been betrayed into those enormous inventions to which I had confessed. Under the circumstances, I felt that Joe could hardly fail to discern in the pale young gentleman, an appropriate passenger to be put into the black velvet coach; therefore, I said nothing of him. Besides, that shrinking from having Miss Havisham and Estella discussed, which had come upon me in the beginning, grew much more potent as time went on. I

reposed complete confidence in no one but Biddy; but I told poor Biddy everything. Why it came natural to me to do so, and why Biddy had a deep concern in everything I told her, I did not know then, though I think I know now.

Meanwhile, councils went on in the kitchen at home, fraught with almost insupportable aggravation to my exasperated spirit. That ass, Pumblechook, used often to come over of a night for the purpose of discussing my prospects with my sister; and I really do believe (to this hour with less penitence than I ought to feel), that if these hands could have taken a linchpin out of his chaise-cart, they would have done it. The miserable man was a man of that confined stolidity of mind, that he could not discuss my prospects without having me before him,—as it were, to operate upon,—and he would drag me up from my stool (usually by the collar) where I was quiet in a corner, and, putting me before the fire as if I were going to be cooked, would begin by saying, “Now, Mum, here is this boy! Here is this boy which you brought up by hand. Hold up your head, boy, and be forever grateful unto them which so did do. Now, Mum, with respections to this boy!” And then he would rumple my hair the wrong way,—which from my earliest remembrance, as already hinted, I have in my soul denied the right of any fellow-creature to do,—and would hold me before him by the sleeve,—a spectacle of imbecility only to be equalled by himself.

Then, he and my sister would pair off in such nonsensical speculations about Miss Havisham, and about what she would do with me and for me, that I used to want—quite painfully—to burst into spiteful tears, fly at Pumblechook, and pummel him all over. In these dialogues, my sister spoke to me as if she were morally wrenching one of my teeth out at every reference; while Pumblechook himself, self-constituted my patron, would sit supervising me with a depreciatory eye, like the architect of my fortunes who thought himself engaged on a very unremunerative job.

In these discussions, Joe bore no part. But he was often talked at, while they were in progress, by reason of Mrs. Joe’s perceiving that he was not favorable to my being taken from the forge. I was fully old enough now to be apprenticed to Joe; and when Joe sat with the poker on his knees thoughtfully raking out the ashes between the lower bars, my sister would so distinctly construe that innocent action into opposition on his part, that she would dive at him, take the poker out of his hands, shake him, and put it

away. There was a most irritating end to every one of these debates. All in a moment, with nothing to lead up to it, my sister would stop herself in a yawn, and catching sight of me as it were incidentally, would swoop upon me with, “Come! there’s enough of you! You get along to bed; you’ve given trouble enough for one night, I hope!” As if I had besought them as a favor to bother my life out.

We went on in this way for a long time, and it seemed likely that we should continue to go on in this way for a long time, when one day Miss Havisham stopped short as she and I were walking, she leaning on my shoulder; and said with some displeasure,—

“You are growing tall, Pip!”

I thought it best to hint, through the medium of a meditative look, that this might be occasioned by circumstances over which I had no control.

She said no more at the time; but she presently stopped and looked at me again; and presently again; and after that, looked frowning and moody. On the next day of my attendance, when our usual exercise was over, and I had landed her at her dressing-table, she stayed me with a movement of her impatient fingers:—

“Tell me the name again of that blacksmith of yours.”

“Joe Gargery, ma’am.”

“Meaning the master you were to be apprenticed to?”

“Yes, Miss Havisham.”

“You had better be apprenticed at once. Would Gargery come here with you, and bring your indentures, do you think?”

I signified that I had no doubt he would take it as an honor to be asked.

“Then let him come.”

“At any particular time, Miss Havisham?”

“There, there! I know nothing about times. Let him come soon, and come along with you.”

When I got home at night, and delivered this message for Joe, my sister “went on the Rampage,” in a more alarming degree than at any previous period. She asked me and Joe whether we supposed she was door-mats under our feet, and how we dared to use her so, and what company we graciously thought she was fit for? When she had exhausted a torrent of such inquiries, she threw a candlestick at Joe, burst into a loud sobbing, got out the dustpan,—which was always a very bad sign,—put on her coarse

apron, and began cleaning up to a terrible extent. Not satisfied with a dry cleaning, she took to a pail and scrubbing-brush, and cleaned us out of house and home, so that we stood shivering in the back-yard. It was ten o’clock at night before we ventured to creep in again, and then she asked Joe why he hadn’t married a Negress Slave at once? Joe offered no answer, poor fellow, but stood feeling his whisker and looking dejectedly at me, as if he thought it really might have been a better speculation.

Chapter XIII

IT WAS A TRIAL to my feelings, on the next day but one, to see Joe arraying himself in his Sunday clothes to accompany me to Miss Havisham's. However, as he thought his court-suit necessary to the occasion, it was not for me to tell him that he looked far better in his working-dress; the rather, because I knew he made himself so dreadfully uncomfortable, entirely on my account, and that it was for me he pulled up his shirt-collar so very high behind, that it made the hair on the crown of his head stand up like a tuft of feathers.

At breakfast-time my sister declared her intention of going to town with us, and being left at Uncle Pumblechook's and called for "when we had done with our fine ladies"—a way of putting the case, from which Joe appeared inclined to augur the worst. The forge was shut up for the day, and Joe inscribed in chalk upon the door (as it was his custom to do on the very rare occasions when he was not at work) the monosyllable *hout*, accompanied by a sketch of an arrow supposed to be flying in the direction he had taken.

We walked to town, my sister leading the way in a very large beaver bonnet, and carrying a basket like the Great Seal of England in plaited Straw, a pair of pattens, a spare shawl, and an umbrella, though it was a fine bright day. I am not quite clear whether these articles were carried penitentially or ostentatiously; but I rather think they were displayed as articles of property,—much as Cleopatra or any other sovereign lady on the Rampage might exhibit her wealth in a pageant or procession.

When we came to Pumblechook's, my sister bounced in and left us. As it was almost noon, Joe and I held straight on to Miss Havisham's house. Estella opened the gate as usual, and, the moment she appeared, Joe took his hat off and stood weighing it by the brim in both his hands; as if he had

some urgent reason in his mind for being particular to half a quarter of an ounce.

Estella took no notice of either of us, but led us the way that I knew so well. I followed next to her, and Joe came last. When I looked back at Joe in the long passage, he was still weighing his hat with the greatest care, and was coming after us in long strides on the tips of his toes.

Estella told me we were both to go in, so I took Joe by the coat-cuff and conducted him into Miss Havisham's presence. She was seated at her dressing-table, and looked round at us immediately.

"Oh!" said she to Joe. "You are the husband of the sister of this boy?"

I could hardly have imagined dear old Joe looking so unlike himself or so like some extraordinary bird; standing as he did speechless, with his tuft of feathers ruffled, and his mouth open as if he wanted a worm.

"You are the husband," repeated Miss Havisham, "of the sister of this boy?"

It was very aggravating; but, throughout the interview, Joe persisted in addressing Me instead of Miss Havisham.

"Which I meantersay, Pip," Joe now observed in a manner that was at once expressive of forcible argumentation, strict confidence, and great politeness, "as I hup and married your sister, and I were at the time what you might call (if you was anyways inclined) a single man."

"Well!" said Miss Havisham. "And you have reared the boy, with the intention of taking him for your apprentice; is that so, Mr. Gargery?"

"You know, Pip," replied Joe, "as you and me were ever friends, and it were looked for'ard to betwixt us, as being calc'lated to lead to larks. Not but what, Pip, if you had ever made objections to the business,—such as its being open to black and sut, or such-like,—not but what they would have been attended to, don't you see?"

"Has the boy," said Miss Havisham, "ever made any objection? Does he like the trade?"

"Which it is well beknown to yourself, Pip," returned Joe, strengthening his former mixture of argumentation, confidence, and politeness, "that it were the wish of your own hart." (I saw the idea suddenly break upon him that he would adapt his epitaph to the occasion, before he went on to say) "And there weren't no objection on your part, and Pip it were the great wish of your hart!"

It was quite in vain for me to endeavor to make him sensible that he ought to speak to Miss Havisham. The more I made faces and gestures to him to do it, the more confidential, argumentative, and polite, he persisted in being to Me.

“Have you brought his indentures with you?” asked Miss Havisham.

“Well, Pip, you know,” replied Joe, as if that were a little unreasonable, “you yourself see me put ’em in my ’at, and therefore you know as they are here.” With which he took them out, and gave them, not to Miss Havisham, but to me. I am afraid I was ashamed of the dear good fellow,—I know I was ashamed of him,—when I saw that Estella stood at the back of Miss Havisham’s chair, and that her eyes laughed mischievously. I took the indentures out of his hand and gave them to Miss Havisham.

“You expected,” said Miss Havisham, as she looked them over, “no premium with the boy?”

“Joe!” I remonstrated, for he made no reply at all. “Why don’t you answer—”

“Pip,” returned Joe, cutting me short as if he were hurt, “which I meantersay that were not a question requiring a answer betwixt yourself and me, and which you know the answer to be full well No. You know it to be No, Pip, and wherefore should I say it?”

Miss Havisham glanced at him as if she understood what he really was better than I had thought possible, seeing what he was there; and took up a little bag from the table beside her.

“Pip has earned a premium here,” she said, “and here it is. There are five-and-twenty guineas in this bag. Give it to your master, Pip.”

As if he were absolutely out of his mind with the wonder awakened in him by her strange figure and the strange room, Joe, even at this pass, persisted in addressing me.

“This is wery liberal on your part, Pip,” said Joe, “and it is as such received and grateful welcome, though never looked for, far nor near, nor nowheres. And now, old chap,” said Joe, conveying to me a sensation, first of burning and then of freezing, for I felt as if that familiar expression were applied to Miss Havisham,—“and now, old chap, may we do our duty! May you and me do our duty, both on us, by one and another, and by them which your liberal present—have—conweyed—to be—for the satisfaction of mind —of—them as never—” here Joe showed that he felt he had fallen into

frightful difficulties, until he triumphantly rescued himself with the words, “and from myself far be it!” These words had such a round and convincing sound for him that he said them twice.

“Good by, Pip!” said Miss Havisham. “Let them out, Estella.”

“Am I to come again, Miss Havisham?” I asked.

“No. Gargery is your master now. Gargery! One word!”

Thus calling him back as I went out of the door, I heard her say to Joe in a distinct emphatic voice, “The boy has been a good boy here, and that is his reward. Of course, as an honest man, you will expect no other and no more.”

How Joe got out of the room, I have never been able to determine; but I know that when he did get out he was steadily proceeding up stairs instead of coming down, and was deaf to all remonstrances until I went after him and laid hold of him. In another minute we were outside the gate, and it was locked, and Estella was gone. When we stood in the daylight alone again, Joe backed up against a wall, and said to me, “Astonishing!” And there he remained so long saying, “Astonishing” at intervals, so often, that I began to think his senses were never coming back. At length he prolonged his remark into “Pip, I do assure you this is as-*ton*-ishing!” and so, by degrees, became conversational and able to walk away.

I have reason to think that Joe’s intellects were brightened by the encounter they had passed through, and that on our way to Pumblechook’s he invented a subtle and deep design. My reason is to be found in what took place in Mr. Pumblechook’s parlor: where, on our presenting ourselves, my sister sat in conference with that detested seedsman.

“Well?” cried my sister, addressing us both at once. “And what’s happened to you? I wonder you condescend to come back to such poor society as this, I am sure I do!”

“Miss Havisham,” said Joe, with a fixed look at me, like an effort of remembrance, “made it wery partick’ler that we should give her—were it compliments or respects, Pip?”

“Compliments,” I said.

“Which that were my own belief,” answered Joe; “her compliments to Mrs. J. Gargery—”

“Much good they’ll do me!” observed my sister; but rather gratified too.

“And wishing,” pursued Joe, with another fixed look at me, like another

effort of remembrance, “that the state of Miss Havisham’s elth were sitch as would have—allowed, were it, Pip?”

“Of her having the pleasure,” I added.

“Of ladies’ company,” said Joe. And drew a long breath.

“Well!” cried my sister, with a mollified glance at Mr. Pumblechook. “She might have had the politeness to send that message at first, but it’s better late than never. And what did she give young Rantipole here?”

“She giv’ him,” said Joe, “nothing.”

Mrs. Joe was going to break out, but Joe went on.

“What she giv’,” said Joe, “she giv’ to his friends. ‘And by his friends,’ were her explanation, ‘I mean into the hands of his sister Mrs. J. Gargery.’ Them were her words; ‘Mrs. J. Gargery.’ She mayn’t have know’d,” added Joe, with an appearance of reflection, “whether it were Joe, or Jorge.”

My sister looked at Pumblechook: who smoothed the elbows of his wooden arm-chair, and nodded at her and at the fire, as if he had known all about it beforehand.

“And how much have you got?” asked my sister, laughing. Positively laughing!

“What would present company say to ten pound?” demanded Joe.

“They’d say,” returned my sister, curtly, “pretty well. Not too much, but pretty well.”

“It’s more than that, then,” said Joe.

That fearful Impostor, Pumblechook, immediately nodded, and said, as he rubbed the arms of his chair, “It’s more than that, Mum.”

“Why, you don’t mean to say—” began my sister.

“Yes I do, Mum,” said Pumblechook; “but wait a bit. Go on, Joseph. Good in you! Go on!”

“What would present company say,” proceeded Joe, “to twenty pound?”

“Handsome would be the word,” returned my sister.

“Well, then,” said Joe, “It’s more than twenty pound.”

That abject hypocrite, Pumblechook, nodded again, and said, with a patronizing laugh, “It’s more than that, Mum. Good again! Follow her up, Joseph!”

“Then to make an end of it,” said Joe, delightedly handing the bag to my sister; “it’s five-and-twenty pound.”

“It’s five-and-twenty pound, Mum,” echoed that basest of swindlers,

Pumblechook, rising to shake hands with her; “and it’s no more than your merits (as I said when my opinion was asked), and I wish you joy of the money!”

If the villain had stopped here, his case would have been sufficiently awful, but he blackened his guilt by proceeding to take me into custody, with a right of patronage that left all his former criminality far behind.

“Now you see, Joseph and wife,” said Pumblechook, as he took me by the arm above the elbow, “I am one of them that always go right through with what they’ve begun. This boy must be bound, out of hand. That’s my way. Bound out of hand.”

“Goodness knows, Uncle Pumblechook,” said my sister (grasping the money), “we’re deeply beholden to you.”

“Never mind me, Mum,” returned that diabolical cornchandler. “A pleasure’s a pleasure all the world over. But this boy, you know; we must have him bound. I said I’d see to it—to tell you the truth.”

The Justices were sitting in the Town Hall near at hand, and we at once went over to have me bound apprentice to Joe in the Magisterial presence. I say we went over, but I was pushed over by Pumblechook, exactly as if I had that moment picked a pocket or fired a rick; indeed, it was the general impression in Court that I had been taken red-handed; for, as Pumblechook shoved me before him through the crowd, I heard some people say, “What’s he done?” and others, “He’s a young ’un, too, but looks bad, don’t he?” One person of mild and benevolent aspect even gave me a tract ornamented with a woodcut of a malevolent young man fitted up with a perfect sausage-shop of fetters, and entitled TO BE READ IN MY CELL.

The Hall was a queer place, I thought, with higher pews in it than a church,—and with people hanging over the pews looking on,—and with mighty Justices (one with a powdered head) leaning back in chairs, with folded arms, or taking snuff, or going to sleep, or writing, or reading the newspapers,—and with some shining black portraits on the walls, which my unartistic eye regarded as a composition of hardbake and sticking-plaster. Here, in a corner my indentures were duly signed and attested, and I was “bound”; Mr. Pumblechook holding me all the while as if we had looked in on our way to the scaffold, to have those little preliminaries disposed of.

When we had come out again, and had got rid of the boys who had been put into great spirits by the expectation of seeing me publicly tortured, and

who were much disappointed to find that my friends were merely rallying round me, we went back to Pumblechook's. And there my sister became so excited by the twenty-five guineas, that nothing would serve her but we must have a dinner out of that windfall at the Blue Boar, and that Pumblechook must go over in his chaise-cart, and bring the Hubbles and Mr. Wopsle.

It was agreed to be done; and a most melancholy day I passed. For, it inscrutably appeared to stand to reason, in the minds of the whole company, that I was an excrescence on the entertainment. And to make it worse, they all asked me from time to time,—in short, whenever they had nothing else to do,—why I didn't enjoy myself? And what could I possibly do then, but say I was enjoying myself,—when I wasn't!

However, they were grown up and had their own way, and they made the most of it. That swindling Pumblechook, exalted into the beneficent contriver of the whole occasion, actually took the top of the table; and, when he addressed them on the subject of my being bound, and had fiendishly congratulated them on my being liable to imprisonment if I played at cards, drank strong liquors, kept late hours or bad company, or indulged in other vagaries which the form of my indentures appeared to contemplate as next to inevitable, he placed me standing on a chair beside him to illustrate his remarks.

My only other remembrances of the great festival are, That they wouldn't let me go to sleep, but whenever they saw me dropping off, woke me up and told me to enjoy myself. That, rather late in the evening Mr. Wopsle gave us Collins's ode, and threw his bloodstained sword in thunder down, with such effect, that a waiter came in and said, "The Commercials underneath sent up their compliments, and it wasn't the Tumblers' Arms." That, they were all in excellent spirits on the road home, and sang, O Lady Fair! Mr. Wopsle taking the bass, and asserting with a tremendously strong voice (in reply to the inquisitive bore who leads that piece of music in a most impertinent manner, by wanting to know all about everybody's private affairs) that he was the man with his white locks flowing, and that he was upon the whole the weakest pilgrim going.

Finally, I remember that when I got into my little bedroom, I was truly wretched, and had a strong conviction on me that I should never like Joe's trade. I had liked it once, but once was not now.

Chapter XIV

IT IS A MOST miserable thing to feel ashamed of home. There may be black ingratitude in the thing, and the punishment may be retributive and well deserved; but that it is a miserable thing, I can testify.

Home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper. But, Joe had sanctified it, and I had believed in it. I had believed in the best parlor as a most elegant saloon; I had believed in the front door, as a mysterious portal of the Temple of State whose solemn opening was attended with a sacrifice of roast fowls; I had believed in the kitchen as a chaste though not magnificent apartment; I had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence. Within a single year all this was changed. Now it was all coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account.

How much of my ungracious condition of mind may have been my own fault, how much Miss Havisham's, how much my sister's, is now of no moment to me or to any one. The change was made in me; the thing was done. Well or ill done, excusably or inexcusably, it was done.

Once, it had seemed to me that when I should at last roll up my shirt-sleeves and go into the forge, Joe's 'prentice, I should be distinguished and happy. Now the reality was in my hold, I only felt that I was dusty with the dust of small-coal, and that I had a weight upon my daily remembrance to which the anvil was a feather. There have been occasions in my later life (I suppose as in most lives) when I have felt for a time as if a thick curtain had fallen on all its interest and romance, to shut me out from anything save dull endurance any more. Never has that curtain dropped so heavy and blank, as when my way in life lay stretched out straight before me through the newly entered road of apprenticeship to Joe.

I remember that at a later period of my "time," I used to stand about the

churchyard on Sunday evenings when night was falling, comparing my own perspective with the windy marsh view, and making out some likeness between them by thinking how flat and low both were, and how on both there came an unknown way and a dark mist and then the sea. I was quite as dejected on the first working-day of my apprenticeship as in that after-time; but I am glad to know that I never breathed a murmur to Joe while my indentures lasted. It is about the only thing I am glad to know of myself in that connection.

For, though it includes what I proceed to add, all the merit of what I proceed to add was Joe's. It was not because I was faithful, but because Joe was faithful, that I never ran away and went for a soldier or a sailor. It was not because I had a strong sense of the virtue of industry, but because Joe had a strong sense of the virtue of industry, that I worked with tolerable zeal against the grain. It is not possible to know how far the influence of any amiable honest-hearted duty-doing man flies out into the world; but it is very possible to know how it has touched one's self in going by, and I know right well that any good that intermixed itself with my apprenticeship came of plain contented Joe, and not of restlessly aspiring discontented me.

What I wanted, who can say? How can I say, when I never knew? What I dreaded was, that in some unlucky hour I, being at my grimiest and commonest, should lift up my eyes and see Estella looking in at one of the wooden windows of the forge. I was haunted by the fear that she would, sooner or later, find me out, with a black face and hands, doing the coarsest part of my work, and would exult over me and despise me. Often after dark, when I was pulling the bellows for Joe, and we were singing Old Clem, and when the thought how we used to sing it at Miss Havisham's would seem to show me Estella's face in the fire, with her pretty hair fluttering in the wind and her eyes scorning me,—often at such a time I would look towards those panels of black night in the wall which the wooden windows then were, and would fancy that I saw her just drawing her face away, and would believe that she had come at last.

After that, when we went in to supper, the place and the meal would have a more homely look than ever, and I would feel more ashamed of home than ever, in my own ungracious breast.

Chapter XV

AS I WAS GETTING too big for Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's room, my education under that preposterous female terminated. Not, however, until Biddy had imparted to me everything she knew, from the little catalogue of prices, to a comic song she had once bought for a half-penny. Although the only coherent part of the latter piece of literature were the opening lines.

When I went to Lunnon town sirs, Too rul loo rul Too rul loo rul Wasn't I done very brown sirs? Too rul loo rul Too rul loo rul—still, in my desire to be wiser, I got this composition by heart with the utmost gravity; nor do I recollect that I questioned its merit, except that I thought (as I still do) the amount of Too rul somewhat in excess of the poetry. In my hunger for information, I made proposals to Mr. Wopsle to bestow some intellectual crumbs upon me, with which he kindly complied. As it turned out, however, that he only wanted me for a dramatic lay-figure, to be contradicted and embraced and wept over and bullied and clutched and stabbed and knocked about in a variety of ways, I soon declined that course of instruction; though not until Mr. Wopsle in his poetic fury had severely mauled me.

Whatever I acquired, I tried to impart to Joe. This statement sounds so well, that I cannot in my conscience let it pass unexplained. I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society and less open to Estella's reproach.

The old Battery out on the marshes was our place of study, and a broken slate and a short piece of slate-pencil were our educational implements: to which Joe always added a pipe of tobacco. I never knew Joe to remember anything from one Sunday to another, or to acquire, under my tuition, any piece of information whatever. Yet he would smoke his pipe at the Battery with a far more sagacious air than anywhere else,—even with a learned air,—as if he considered himself to be advancing immensely. Dear fellow, I

hope he did.

It was pleasant and quiet, out there with the sails on the river passing beyond the earthwork, and sometimes, when the tide was low, looking as if they belonged to sunken ships that were still sailing on at the bottom of the water. Whenever I watched the vessels standing out to sea with their white sails spread, I somehow thought of Miss Havisham and Estella; and whenever the light struck aslant, afar off, upon a cloud or sail or green hillside or water-line, it was just the same.—Miss Havisham and Estella and the strange house and the strange life appeared to have something to do with everything that was picturesque.

One Sunday when Joe, greatly enjoying his pipe, had so plumed himself on being “most awful dull,” that I had given him up for the day, I lay on the earthwork for some time with my chin on my hand, descrying traces of Miss Havisham and Estella all over the prospect, in the sky and in the water, until at last I resolved to mention a thought concerning them that had been much in my head.

“Joe,” said I; “don’t you think I ought to make Miss Havisham a visit?”

“Well, Pip,” returned Joe, slowly considering. “What for?”

“What for, Joe? What is any visit made for?”

“There is some wisits p’r’aps,” said Joe, “as for ever remains open to the question, Pip. But in regard to wisiting Miss Havisham. She might think you wanted something,—expected something of her.”

“Don’t you think I might say that I did not, Joe?”

“You might, old chap,” said Joe. “And she might credit it. Similarly she mightn’t.”

Joe felt, as I did, that he had made a point there, and he pulled hard at his pipe to keep himself from weakening it by repetition.

“You see, Pip,” Joe pursued, as soon as he was past that danger, “Miss Havisham done the handsome thing by you. When Miss Havisham done the handsome thing by you, she called me back to say to me as that were all.”

“Yes, Joe. I heard her.”

“*All*,” Joe repeated, very emphatically.

“Yes, Joe. I tell you, I heard her.”

“Which I meantersay, Pip, it might be that her meaning were,—Make a end on it!—As you was!—Me to the North, and you to the South!—Keep in sunders!”

I had thought of that too, and it was very far from comforting to me to find that he had thought of it; for it seemed to render it more probable.

"But, Joe."

"Yes, old chap."

"Here am I, getting on in the first year of my time, and, since the day of my being bound, I have never thanked Miss Havisham, or asked after her, or shown that I remember her."

"That's true, Pip; and unless you was to turn her out a set of shoes all four round,—and which I meantersay as even a set of shoes all four round might not be acceptable as a present, in a total wacancy of hoofs—"

"I don't mean that sort of remembrance, Joe; I don't mean a present."

But Joe had got the idea of a present in his head and must harp upon it. "Or even," said he, "if you was helped to knocking her up a new chain for the front door,—or say a gross or two of shark-headed screws for general use,—or some light fancy article, such as a toasting-fork when she took her muffins,—or a gridiron when she took a sprat or such like—"

"I don't mean any present at all, Joe," I interposed.

"Well," said Joe, still harping on it as though I had particularly pressed it, "if I was yourself, Pip, I wouldn't. No, I would not. For what's a door-chain when she's got one always up? And shark-headers is open to misrepresentations. And if it was a toasting-fork, you'd go into brass and do yourself no credit. And the oncommonest workman can't show himself oncommon in a gridiron,—for a gridiron *is* a gridiron," said Joe, steadfastly impressing it upon me, as if he were endeavouring to rouse me from a fixed delusion, "and you may haim at what you like, but a gridiron it will come out, either by your leave or again your leave, and you can't help yourself —"

"My dear Joe," I cried, in desperation, taking hold of his coat, "don't go on in that way. I never thought of making Miss Havisham any present."

"No, Pip," Joe assented, as if he had been contending for that, all along; "and what I say to you is, you are right, Pip."

"Yes, Joe; but what I wanted to say, was, that as we are rather slack just now, if you would give me a half-holiday to-morrow, I think I would go up-town and make a call on Miss Est—Havisham."

"Which her name," said Joe, gravely, "ain't Estavisham, Pip, unless she have been rechris'ened."

“I know, Joe, I know. It was a slip of mine. What do you think of it, Joe?”

In brief, Joe thought that if I thought well of it, he thought well of it. But, he was particular in stipulating that if I were not received with cordiality, or if I were not encouraged to repeat my visit as a visit which had no ulterior object but was simply one of gratitude for a favor received, then this experimental trip should have no successor. By these conditions I promised to abide.

Now, Joe kept a journeyman at weekly wages whose name was Orlick. He pretended that his Christian name was Dolge,—a clear Impossibility,—but he was a fellow of that obstinate disposition that I believe him to have been the prey of no delusion in this particular, but wilfully to have imposed that name upon the village as an affront to its understanding. He was a broadshouldered loose-limbed swarthy fellow of great strength, never in a hurry, and always slouching. He never even seemed to come to his work on purpose, but would slouch in as if by mere accident; and when he went to the Jolly Bargemen to eat his dinner, or went away at night, he would slouch out, like Cain or the Wandering Jew, as if he had no idea where he was going and no intention of ever coming back. He lodged at a sluice-keeper’s out on the marshes, and on working-days would come slouching from his hermitage, with his hands in his pockets and his dinner loosely tied in a bundle round his neck and dangling on his back. On Sundays he mostly lay all day on the sluice-gates, or stood against ricks and barns. He always slouched, locomotively, with his eyes on the ground; and, when accosted or otherwise required to raise them, he looked up in a half-resentful, half-puzzled way, as though the only thought he ever had was, that it was rather an odd and injurious fact that he should never be thinking.

This morose journeyman had no liking for me. When I was very small and timid, he gave me to understand that the Devil lived in a black corner of the forge, and that he knew the fiend very well: also that it was necessary to make up the fire, once in seven years, with a live boy, and that I might consider myself fuel. When I became Joe’s ’prentice, Orlick was perhaps confirmed in some suspicion that I should displace him; howbeit, he liked me still less. Not that he ever said anything, or did anything, openly importing hostility; I only noticed that he always beat his sparks in my direction, and that whenever I sang Old Clem, he came in out of time.

Dolge Orlick was at work and present, next day, when I reminded Joe of my half-holiday. He said nothing at the moment, for he and Joe had just got a piece of hot iron between them, and I was at the bellows; but by and by he said, leaning on his hammer,—

"Now, master! Sure you're not a going to favor only one of us. If Young Pip has a half-holiday, do as much for Old Orlick." I suppose he was about five-and-twenty, but he usually spoke of himself as an ancient person.

"Why, what'll you do with a half-holiday, if you get it?" said Joe.

"What'll I do with it! What'll he do with it? I'll do as much with it as him," said Orlick.

"As to Pip, he's going up town," said Joe.

"Well then, as to Old Orlick, he's a going up town," retorted that worthy. "Two can go up town. Tain't only one wot can go up town."

"Don't lose your temper," said Joe.

"Shall if I like," growled Orlick. "Some and their up-towning! Now, master! Come. No favoring in this shop. Be a man!"

The master refusing to entertain the subject until the journeyman was in a better temper, Orlick plunged at the furnace, drew out a red-hot bar, made at me with it as if he were going to run it through my body, whisked it round my head, laid it on the anvil, hammered it out,—as if it were I, I thought, and the sparks were my spirting blood,—and finally said, when he had hammered himself hot and the iron cold, and he again leaned on his hammer,—

"Now, master!"

"Are you all right now?" demanded Joe.

"Ah! I am all right," said gruff Old Orlick.

"Then, as in general you stick to your work as well as most men," said Joe, "let it be a half-holiday for all."

My sister had been standing silent in the yard, within hearing,—she was a most unscrupulous spy and listener,—and she instantly looked in at one of the windows.

"Like you, you fool!" said she to Joe, "giving holidays to great idle hulkers like that. You are a rich man, upon my life, to waste wages in that way. I wish I was his master!"

"You'd be everybody's master, if you durst," retorted Orlick, with an ill-favored grin.

(“Let her alone,” said Joe.)

“I’d be a match for all noodles and all rogues,” returned my sister, beginning to work herself into a mighty rage. “And I couldn’t be a match for the noodles, without being a match for your master, who’s the dunder-headed king of the noodles. And I couldn’t be a match for the rogues, without being a match for you, who are the blackest-looking and the worst rogue between this and France. Now!”

“You’re a foul shrew, Mother Gargery,” growled the journeyman. “If that makes a judge of rogues, you ought to be a good’un.”

(“Let her alone, will you?” said Joe.)

“What did you say?” cried my sister, beginning to scream. “What did you say? What did that fellow Orlick say to me, Pip? What did he call me, with my husband standing by? Oh! oh! oh!” Each of these exclamations was a shriek; and I must remark of my sister, what is equally true of all the violent women I have ever seen, that passion was no excuse for her, because it is undeniable that instead of lapsing into passion, she consciously and deliberately took extraordinary pains to force herself into it, and became blindly furious by regular stages; “what was the name he gave me before the base man who swore to defend me? Oh! Hold me! Oh!”

“Ah-h-h!” growled the journeyman, between his teeth, “I’d hold you, if you was my wife. I’d hold you under the pump, and choke it out of you.”

(“I tell you, let her alone,” said Joe.)

“Oh! To hear him!” cried my sister, with a clap of her hands and a scream together,—which was her next stage. “To hear the names he’s giving me! That Orlick! In my own house! Me, a married woman! With my husband standing by! Oh! Oh!” Here my sister, after a fit of clappings and screamings, beat her hands upon her bosom and upon her knees, and threw her cap off, and pulled her hair down,—which were the last stages on her road to frenzy. Being by this time a perfect Fury and a complete success, she made a dash at the door which I had fortunately locked.

What could the wretched Joe do now, after his disregarded parenthetical interruptions, but stand up to his journeyman, and ask him what he meant by interfering betwixt himself and Mrs. Joe; and further whether he was man enough to come on? Old Orlick felt that the situation admitted of nothing less than coming on, and was on his defence straightway; so, without so much as pulling off their singed and burnt aprons, they went at

one another, like two giants. But, if any man in that neighborhood could stand uplong against Joe, I never saw the man. Orlick, as if he had been of no more account than the pale young gentleman, was very soon among the coal-dust, and in no hurry to come out of it. Then Joe unlocked the door and picked up my sister, who had dropped insensible at the window (but who had seen the fight first, I think), and who was carried into the house and laid down, and who was recommended to revive, and would do nothing but struggle and clench her hands in Joe's hair. Then, came that singular calm and silence which succeed all uproars; and then, with the vague sensation which I have always connected with such a lull,—namely, that it was Sunday, and somebody was dead,—I went up stairs to dress myself.

When I came down again, I found Joe and Orlick sweeping up, without any other traces of discomposure than a slit in one of Orlick's nostrils, which was neither expressive nor ornamental. A pot of beer had appeared from the Jolly Bargemen, and they were sharing it by turns in a peaceable manner. The lull had a sedative and philosophical influence on Joe, who followed me out into the road to say, as a parting observation that might do me good, "On the Rampage, Pip, and off the Rampage, Pip:—such is Life!"

With what absurd emotions (for we think the feelings that are very serious in a man quite comical in a boy) I found myself again going to Miss Havisham's, matters little here. Nor, how I passed and repassed the gate many times before I could make up my mind to ring. Nor, how I debated whether I should go away without ringing; nor, how I should undoubtedly have gone, if my time had been my own, to come back.

Miss Sarah Pocket came to the gate. No Estella.

"How, then? You here again?" said Miss Pocket. "What do you want?"

When I said that I only came to see how Miss Havisham was, Sarah evidently deliberated whether or no she should send me about my business. But unwilling to hazard the responsibility, she let me in, and presently brought the sharp message that I was to "come up."

Everything was unchanged, and Miss Havisham was alone.

"Well?" said she, fixing her eyes upon me. "I hope you want nothing? You'll get nothing."

"No indeed, Miss Havisham. I only wanted you to know that I am doing very well in my apprenticeship, and am always much obliged to you."

"There, there!" with the old restless fingers. "Come now and then; come

on your birthday.—Ay!" she cried suddenly, turning herself and her chair towards me, "You are looking round for Estella? Hey?"

I had been looking round,—in fact, for Estella,—and I stammered that I hoped she was well.

"Abroad," said Miss Havisham; "educating for a lady; far out of reach; prettier than ever; admired by all who see her. Do you feel that you have lost her?"

There was such a malignant enjoyment in her utterance of the last words, and she broke into such a disagreeable laugh, that I was at a loss what to say. She spared me the trouble of considering, by dismissing me. When the gate was closed upon me by Sarah of the walnut-shell countenance, I felt more than ever dissatisfied with my home and with my trade and with everything; and that was all I took by that motion.

As I was loitering along the High Street, looking in disconsolately at the shop windows, and thinking what I would buy if I were a gentleman, who should come out of the bookshop but Mr. Wopsle. Mr. Wopsle had in his hand the affecting tragedy of George Barnwell, in which he had that moment invested sixpence, with the view of heaping every word of it on the head of Pumblechook, with whom he was going to drink tea. No sooner did he see me, than he appeared to consider that a special Providence had put a 'prentice in his way to be read at; and he laid hold of me, and insisted on my accompanying him to the Pumblechookian parlor. As I knew it would be miserable at home, and as the nights were dark and the way was dreary, and almost any companionship on the road was better than none, I made no great resistance; consequently, we turned into Pumblechook's just as the street and the shops were lighting up.

As I never assisted at any other representation of George Barnwell, I don't know how long it may usually take; but I know very well that it took until half-past nine o' clock that night, and that when Mr. Wopsle got into Newgate, I thought he never would go to the scaffold, he became so much slower than at any former period of his disgraceful career. I thought it a little too much that he should complain of being cut short in his flower after all, as if he had not been running to seed, leaf after leaf, ever since his course began. This, however, was a mere question of length and wearisomeness. What stung me, was the identification of the whole affair with my unoffending self. When Barnwell began to go wrong, I declare that

I felt positively apologetic, Pumblechook's indignant stare so taxed me with it. Wopsle, too, took pains to present me in the worst light. At once ferocious and maudlin, I was made to murder my uncle with no extenuating circumstances whatever; Millwood put me down in argument, on every occasion; it became sheer monomania in my master's daughter to care a button for me; and all I can say for my gasping and procrastinating conduct on the fatal morning, is, that it was worthy of the general feebleness of my character. Even after I was happily hanged and Wopsle had closed the book, Pumblechook sat staring at me, and shaking his head, and saying, "Take warning, boy, take warning!" as if it were a well-known fact that I contemplated murdering a near relation, provided I could only induce one to have the weakness to become my benefactor.

It was a very dark night when it was all over, and when I set out with Mr. Wopsle on the walk home. Beyond town, we found a heavy mist out, and it fell wet and thick. The turnpike lamp was a blur, quite out of the lamp's usual place apparently, and its rays looked solid substance on the fog. We were noticing this, and saying how that the mist rose with a change of wind from a certain quarter of our marshes, when we came upon a man, slouching under the lee of the turnpike house.

"Halloa!" we said, stopping. "Orlick there?"

"Ah!" he answered, slouching out. "I was standing by a minute, on the chance of company."

"You are late," I remarked.

Orlick not unnaturally answered, "Well? And you're late."

"We have been," said Mr. Wopsle, exalted with his late performance, —"we have been indulging, Mr. Orlick, in an intellectual evening."

Old Orlick growled, as if he had nothing to say about that, and we all went on together. I asked him presently whether he had been spending his half-holiday up and down town?

"Yes," said he, "all of it. I come in behind yourself. I didn't see you, but I must have been pretty close behind you. By the by, the guns is going again."

"At the Hulks?" said I.

"Ay! There's some of the birds flown from the cages. The guns have been going since dark, about. You'll hear one presently."

In effect, we had not walked many yards further, when the well-

remembered boom came towards us, deadened by the mist, and heavily rolled away along the low grounds by the river, as if it were pursuing and threatening the fugitives.

“A good night for cutting off in,” said Orlick. “We’d be puzzled how to bring down a jail-bird on the wing, to-night.”

The subject was a suggestive one to me, and I thought about it in silence. Mr. Wopsle, as the ill-requited uncle of the evening’s tragedy, fell to meditating aloud in his garden at Camberwell. Orlick, with his hands in his pockets, slouched heavily at my side. It was very dark, very wet, very muddy, and so we splashed along. Now and then, the sound of the signal cannon broke upon us again, and again rolled sulkily along the course of the river. I kept myself to myself and my thoughts. Mr. Wopsle died amiably at Camberwell, and exceedingly game on Bosworth Field, and in the greatest agonies at Glastonbury. Orlick sometimes growled, “Beat it out, beat it out, —Old Clem! With a clink for the stout,—Old Clem!” I thought he had been drinking, but he was not drunk.

Thus, we came to the village. The way by which we approached it took us past the Three Jolly Bargemen, which we were surprised to find—it being eleven o’clock—in a state of commotion, with the door wide open, and unwonted lights that had been hastily caught up and put down scattered about. Mr. Wopsle dropped in to ask what was the matter (surmising that a convict had been taken), but came running out in a great hurry.

“There’s something wrong,” said he, without stopping, “up at your place, Pip. Run all!”

“What is it?” I asked, keeping up with him. So did Orlick, at my side.

“I can’t quite understand. The house seems to have been violently entered when Joe Gargery was out. Supposed by convicts. Somebody has been attacked and hurt.”

We were running too fast to admit of more being said, and we made no stop until we got into our kitchen. It was full of people; the whole village was there, or in the yard; and there was a surgeon, and there was Joe, and there were a group of women, all on the floor in the midst of the kitchen. The unemployed bystanders drew back when they saw me, and so I became aware of my sister,—lying without sense or movement on the bare boards where she had been knocked down by a tremendous blow on the back of the head, dealt by some unknown hand when her face was turned towards the

fire,—destined never to be on the Rampage again, while she was the wife of Joe.

Chapter XVI

WITH MY HEAD FULL of George Barnwell, I was at first disposed to believe that I must have had some hand in the attack upon my sister, or at all events that as her near relation, popularly known to be under obligations to her, I was a more legitimate object of suspicion than any one else. But when, in the clearer light of next morning, I began to reconsider the matter and to hear it discussed around me on all sides, I took another view of the case, which was more reasonable.

Joe had been at the Three Jolly Bargemen, smoking his pipe, from a quarter after eight o'clock to a quarter before ten. While he was there, my sister had been seen standing at the kitchen door, and had exchanged Good Night with a farm-laborer going home. The man could not be more particular as to the time at which he saw her (he got into dense confusion when he tried to be), than that it must have been before nine. When Joe went home at five minutes before ten, he found her struck down on the floor, and promptly called in assistance. The fire had not then burnt unusually low, nor was the snuff of the candle very long; the candle, however, had been blown out.

Nothing had been taken away from any part of the house. Neither, beyond the blowing out of the candle,—which stood on a table between the door and my sister, and was behind her when she stood facing the fire and was struck,—was there any disarrangement of the kitchen, excepting such as she herself had made, in falling and bleeding. But, there was one remarkable piece of evidence on the spot. She had been struck with something blunt and heavy, on the head and spine; after the blows were dealt, something heavy had been thrown down at her with considerable violence, as she lay on her face. And on the ground beside her, when Joe picked her up, was a convict's leg-iron which had been filed asunder.

Now, Joe, examining this iron with a smith's eye, declared it to have been filed asunder some time ago. The hue and cry going off to the Hulks, and people coming thence to examine the iron, Joe's opinion was corroborated. They did not undertake to say when it had left the prison-ships to which it undoubtedly had once belonged; but they claimed to know for certain that that particular manacle had not been worn by either of the two convicts who had escaped last night. Further, one of those two was already retaken, and had not freed himself of his iron.

Knowing what I knew, I set up an inference of my own here. I believed the iron to be my convict's iron,—the iron I had seen and heard him filing at, on the marshes,—but my mind did not accuse him of having put it to its latest use. For I believed one of two other persons to have become possessed of it, and to have turned it to this cruel account. Either Orlick, or the strange man who had shown me the file.

Now, as to Orlick; he had gone to town exactly as he told us when we picked him up at the turnpike, he had been seen about town all the evening, he had been in divers companies in several public-houses, and he had come back with myself and Mr. Wopsle. There was nothing against him, save the quarrel; and my sister had quarrelled with him, and with everybody else about her, ten thousand times. As to the strange man; if he had come back for his two bank-notes there could have been no dispute about them, because my sister was fully prepared to restore them. Besides, there had been no altercation; the assailant had come in so silently and suddenly, that she had been felled before she could look round.

It was horrible to think that I had provided the weapon, however undesignedly, but I could hardly think otherwise. I suffered unspeakable trouble while I considered and reconsidered whether I should at last dissolve that spell of my childhood and tell Joe all the story. For months afterwards, I every day settled the question finally in the negative, and reopened and reargued it next morning. The contention came, after all, to this;—the secret was such an old one now, had so grown into me and become a part of myself, that I could not tear it away. In addition to the dread that, having led up to so much mischief, it would be now more likely than ever to alienate Joe from me if he believed it, I had a further restraining dread that he would not believe it, but would assort it with the fabulous dogs and veal-cutlets as a monstrous invention. However, I

temporized with myself, of course—for, was I not wavering between right and wrong, when the thing is always done?—and resolved to make a full disclosure if I should see any such new occasion as a new chance of helping in the discovery of the assailant.

The Constables and the Bow Street men from London—for, this happened in the days of the extinct red-waistcoated police—were about the house for a week or two, and did pretty much what I have heard and read of like authorities doing in other such cases. They took up several obviously wrong people, and they ran their heads very hard against wrong ideas, and persisted in trying to fit the circumstances to the ideas, instead of trying to extract ideas from the circumstances. Also, they stood about the door of the Jolly Bargemen, with knowing and reserved looks that filled the whole neighborhood with admiration; and they had a mysterious manner of taking their drink, that was almost as good as taking the culprit. But not quite, for they never did it.

Long after these constitutional powers had dispersed, my sister lay very ill in bed. Her sight was disturbed, so that she saw objects multiplied, and grasped at visionary teacups and wineglasses instead of the realities; her hearing was greatly impaired; her memory also; and her speech was unintelligible. When, at last, she came round so far as to be helped down stairs, it was still necessary to keep my slate always by her, that she might indicate in writing what she could not indicate in speech. As she was (very bad handwriting apart) a more than indifferent speller, and as Joe was a more than indifferent reader, extraordinary complications arose between them which I was always called in to solve. The administration of mutton instead of medicine, the substitution of Tea for Joe, and the baker for bacon, were among the mildest of my own mistakes.

However, her temper was greatly improved, and she was patient. A tremulous uncertainty of the action of all her limbs soon became a part of her regular state, and afterwards, at intervals of two or three months, she would often put her hands to her head, and would then remain for about a week at a time in some gloomy aberration of mind. We were at a loss to find a suitable attendant for her, until a circumstance happened conveniently to relieve us. Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt conquered a confirmed habit of living into which she had fallen, and Biddy became a part of our establishment.

It may have been about a month after my sister’s reappearance in the

kitchen, when Biddy came to us with a small speckled box containing the whole of her worldly effects, and became a blessing to the household. Above all, she was a blessing to Joe, for the dear old fellow was sadly cut up by the constant contemplation of the wreck of his wife, and had been accustomed, while attending on her of an evening, to turn to me every now and then and say, with his blue eyes moistened, “Such a fine figure of a woman as she once were, Pip!” Biddy instantly taking the cleverest charge of her as though she had studied her from infancy; Joe became able in some sort to appreciate the greater quiet of his life, and to get down to the Jolly Bargemen now and then for a change that did him good. It was characteristic of the police people that they had all more or less suspected poor Joe (though he never knew it), and that they had to a man concurred in regarding him as one of the deepest spirits they had ever encountered.

Biddy’s first triumph in her new office, was to solve a difficulty that had completely vanquished me. I had tried hard at it, but had made nothing of it. Thus it was:—

Again and again and again, my sister had traced upon the slate, a character that looked like a curious T, and then with the utmost eagerness had called our attention to it as something she particularly wanted. I had in vain tried everything producible that began with a T, from tar to toast and tub. At length it had come into my head that the sign looked like a hammer, and on my lustily calling that word in my sister’s ear, she had begun to hammer on the table and had expressed a qualified assent. Thereupon, I had brought in all our hammers, one after another, but without avail. Then I bethought me of a crutch, the shape being much the same, and I borrowed one in the village, and displayed it to my sister with considerable confidence. But she shook her head to that extent when she was shown it, that we were terrified lest in her weak and shattered state she should dislocate her neck.

When my sister found that Biddy was very quick to understand her, this mysterious sign reappeared on the slate. Biddy looked thoughtfully at it, heard my explanation, looked thoughtfully at my sister, looked thoughtfully at Joe (who was always represented on the slate by his initial letter), and ran into the forge, followed by Joe and me.

“Why, of course!” cried Biddy, with an exultant face. “Don’t you see? It’s him!”

Orlick, without a doubt! She had lost his name, and could only signify him by his hammer. We told him why we wanted him to come into the kitchen, and he slowly laid down his hammer, wiped his brow with his arm, took another wipe at it with his apron, and came slouching out, with a curious loose vagabond bend in the knees that strongly distinguished him.

I confess that I expected to see my sister denounce him, and that I was disappointed by the different result. She manifested the greatest anxiety to be on good terms with him, was evidently much pleased by his being at length produced, and motioned that she would have him given something to drink. She watched his countenance as if she were particularly wishful to be assured that he took kindly to his reception, she showed every possible desire to conciliate him, and there was an air of humble propitiation in all she did, such as I have seen pervade the bearing of a child towards a hard master. After that day, a day rarely passed without her drawing the hammer on her slate, and without Orlick’s slouching in and standing doggedly before her, as if he knew no more than I did what to make of it.

Chapter XVII

I NOW FELL INTO a regular routine of apprenticeship life, which was varied beyond the limits of the village and the marshes, by no more remarkable circumstance than the arrival of my birthday and my paying another visit to Miss Havisham. I found Miss Sarah Pocket still on duty at the gate; I found Miss Havisham just as I had left her, and she spoke of Estella in the very same way, if not in the very same words. The interview lasted but a few minutes, and she gave me a guinea when I was going, and told me to come again on my next birthday. I may mention at once that this became an annual custom. I tried to decline taking the guinea on the first occasion, but with no better effect than causing her to ask me very angrily, if I expected more? Then, and after that, I took it.

So unchanging was the dull old house, the yellow light in the darkened room, the faded spectre in the chair by the dressing-table glass, that I felt as if the stopping of the clocks had stopped Time in that mysterious place, and, while I and everything else outside it grew older, it stood still. Daylight never entered the house as to my thoughts and remembrances of it, any more than as to the actual fact. It bewildered me, and under its influence I continued at heart to hate my trade and to be ashamed of home.

Imperceptibly I became conscious of a change in Biddy, however. Her shoes came up at the heel, her hair grew bright and neat, her hands were always clean. She was not beautiful,—she was common, and could not be like Estella,—but she was pleasant and wholesome and sweet-tempered. She had not been with us more than a year (I remember her being newly out of mourning at the time it struck me), when I observed to myself one evening that she had curiously thoughtful and attentive eyes; eyes that were very pretty and very good.

It came of my lifting up my own eyes from a task I was poring at—

writing some passages from a book, to improve myself in two ways at once by a sort of stratagem—and seeing Biddy observant of what I was about. I laid down my pen, and Biddy stopped in her needlework without laying it down.

“Biddy,” said I, “how do you manage it? Either I am very stupid, or you are very clever.”

“What is it that I manage? I don’t know,” returned Biddy, smiling.

She managed our whole domestic life, and wonderfully too; but I did not mean that, though that made what I did mean more surprising.

“How do you manage, Biddy,” said I, “to learn everything that I learn, and always to keep up with me?” I was beginning to be rather vain of my knowledge, for I spent my birthday guineas on it, and set aside the greater part of my pocket-money for similar investment; though I have no doubt, now, that the little I knew was extremely dear at the price.

“I might as well ask you,” said Biddy, “how you manage?”

“No; because when I come in from the forge of a night, any one can see me turning to at it. But you never turn to at it, Biddy.”

“I suppose I must catch it like a cough,” said Biddy, quietly; and went on with her sewing.

Pursuing my idea as I leaned back in my wooden chair, and looked at Biddy sewing away with her head on one side, I began to think her rather an extraordinary girl. For I called to mind now, that she was equally accomplished in the terms of our trade, and the names of our different sorts of work, and our various tools. In short, whatever I knew, Biddy knew. Theoretically, she was already as good a blacksmith as I, or better.

“You are one of those, Biddy,” said I, “who make the most of every chance. You never had a chance before you came here, and see how improved you are!”

Biddy looked at me for an instant, and went on with her sewing. “I was your first teacher though; wasn’t I?” said she, as she sewed.

“Biddy!” I exclaimed, in amazement. “Why, you are crying!”

“No I am not,” said Biddy, looking up and laughing. “What put that in your head?”

What could have put it in my head but the glistening of a tear as it dropped on her work? I sat silent, recalling what a drudge she had been until Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt successfully overcame that bad habit of

living, so highly desirable to be got rid of by some people. I recalled the hopeless circumstances by which she had been surrounded in the miserable little shop and the miserable little noisy evening school, with that miserable old bundle of incompetence always to be dragged and shouldered. I reflected that even in those untoward times there must have been latent in Biddy what was now developing, for, in my first uneasiness and discontent I had turned to her for help, as a matter of course. Biddy sat quietly sewing, shedding no more tears, and while I looked at her and thought about it all, it occurred to me that perhaps I had not been sufficiently grateful to Biddy. I might have been too reserved, and should have patronized her more (though I did not use that precise word in my meditations) with my confidence.

"Yes, Biddy," I observed, when I had done turning it over, "you were my first teacher, and that at a time when we little thought of ever being together like this, in this kitchen."

"Ah, poor thing!" replied Biddy. It was like her self-forgetfulness to transfer the remark to my sister, and to get up and be busy about her, making her more comfortable; "that's sadly true!"

"Well!" said I, "we must talk together a little more, as we used to do. And I must consult you a little more, as I used to do. Let us have a quiet walk on the marshes next Sunday, Biddy, and a long chat."

My sister was never left alone now; but Joe more than readily undertook the care of her on that Sunday afternoon, and Biddy and I went out together. It was summer-time, and lovely weather. When we had passed the village and the church and the churchyard, and were out on the marshes and began to see the sails of the ships as they sailed on, I began to combine Miss Havisham and Estella with the prospect, in my usual way. When we came to the river-side and sat down on the bank, with the water rippling at our feet, making it all more quiet than it would have been without that sound, I resolved that it was a good time and place for the admission of Biddy into my inner confidence.

"Biddy," said I, after binding her to secrecy, "I want to be a gentleman."

"O, I wouldn't, if I was you!" she returned. "I don't think it would answer."

"Biddy," said I, with some severity, "I have particular reasons for wanting to be a gentleman."

"You know best, Pip; but don't you think you are happier as you are?"

“Biddy,” I exclaimed, impatiently, “I am not at all happy as I am. I am disgusted with my calling and with my life. I have never taken to either, since I was bound. Don’t be absurd.”

“Was I absurd?” said Biddy, quietly raising her eyebrows; “I am sorry for that; I didn’t mean to be. I only want you to do well, and to be comfortable.”

“Well, then, understand once for all that I never shall or can be comfortable—or anything but miserable—there, Biddy!—unless I can lead a very different sort of life from the life I lead now.”

“That’s a pity!” said Biddy, shaking her head with a sorrowful air.

Now, I too had so often thought it a pity, that, in the singular kind of quarrel with myself which I was always carrying on, I was half inclined to shed tears of vexation and distress when Biddy gave utterance to her sentiment and my own. I told her she was right, and I knew it was much to be regretted, but still it was not to be helped.

“If I could have settled down,” I said to Biddy, plucking up the short grass within reach, much as I had once upon a time pulled my feelings out of my hair and kicked them into the brewery wall,—“if I could have settled down and been but half as fond of the forge as I was when I was little, I know it would have been much better for me. You and I and Joe would have wanted nothing then, and Joe and I would perhaps have gone partners when I was out of my time, and I might even have grown up to keep company with you, and we might have sat on this very bank on a fine Sunday, quite different people. I should have been good enough for you; shouldn’t I, Biddy?”

Biddy sighed as she looked at the ships sailing on, and returned for answer, “Yes; I am not over-particular.” It scarcely sounded flattering, but I knew she meant well.

“Instead of that,” said I, plucking up more grass and chewing a blade or two, “see how I am going on. Dissatisfied, and uncomfortable, and—what would it signify to me, being coarse and common, if nobody had told me so!”

Biddy turned her face suddenly towards mine, and looked far more attentively at me than she had looked at the sailing ships.

“It was neither a very true nor a very polite thing to say,” she remarked, directing her eyes to the ships again. “Who said it?”

I was disconcerted, for I had broken away without quite seeing where I was going to. It was not to be shuffled off now, however, and I answered, “The beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham’s, and she’s more beautiful than anybody ever was, and I admire her dreadfully, and I want to be a gentleman on her account.” Having made this lunatic confession, I began to throw my torn-up grass into the river, as if I had some thoughts of following it.

“Do you want to be a gentleman, to spite her or to gain her over?” Biddy quietly asked me, after a pause.

“I don’t know,” I moodily answered.

“Because, if it is to spite her,” Biddy pursued, “I should think—but you know best—that might be better and more independently done by caring nothing for her words. And if it is to gain her over, I should think—but you know best—she was not worth gaining over.”

Exactly what I myself had thought, many times. Exactly what was perfectly manifest to me at the moment. But how could I, a poor dazed village lad, avoid that wonderful inconsistency into which the best and wisest of men fall every day?

“It may be all quite true,” said I to Biddy, “but I admire her dreadfully.”

In short, I turned over on my face when I came to that, and got a good grasp on the hair on each side of my head, and wrenched it well. All the while knowing the madness of my heart to be so very mad and misplaced, that I was quite conscious it would have served my face right, if I had lifted it up by my hair, and knocked it against the pebbles as a punishment for belonging to such an idiot.

Biddy was the wisest of girls, and she tried to reason no more with me. She put her hand, which was a comfortable hand though roughened by work, upon my hands, one after another, and gently took them out of my hair. Then she softly patted my shoulder in a soothing way, while with my face upon my sleeve I cried a little,—exactly as I had done in the brewery yard,—and felt vaguely convinced that I was very much ill-used by somebody, or by everybody; I can’t say which.

“I am glad of one thing,” said Biddy, “and that is, that you have felt you could give me your confidence, Pip. And I am glad of another thing, and that is, that of course you know you may depend upon my keeping it and always so far deserving it. If your first teacher (dear! such a poor one, and

so much in need of being taught herself!) had been your teacher at the present time, she thinks she knows what lesson she would set. But it would be a hard one to learn, and you have got beyond her, and it's of no use now." So, with a quiet sigh for me, Biddy rose from the bank, and said, with a fresh and pleasant change of voice, "Shall we walk a little farther, or go home?"

"Biddy," I cried, getting up, putting my arm round her neck, and giving her a kiss, "I shall always tell you everything."

"Till you're a gentleman," said Biddy.

"You know I never shall be, so that's always. Not that I have any occasion to tell you anything, for you know everything I know,—as I told you at home the other night."

"Ah!" said Biddy, quite in a whisper, as she looked away at the ships. And then repeated, with her former pleasant change, "shall we walk a little farther, or go home?"

I said to Biddy we would walk a little farther, and we did so, and the summer afternoon toned down into the summer evening, and it was very beautiful. I began to consider whether I was not more naturally and wholesomely situated, after all, in these circumstances, than playing beggar my neighbor by candle-light in the room with the stopped clocks, and being despised by Estella. I thought it would be very good for me if I could get her out of my head, with all the rest of those remembrances and fancies, and could go to work determined to relish what I had to do, and stick to it, and make the best of it. I asked myself the question whether I did not surely know that if Estella were beside me at that moment instead of Biddy, she would make me miserable? I was obliged to admit that I did know it for a certainty, and I said to myself, "Pip, what a fool you are!"

We talked a good deal as we walked, and all that Biddy said seemed right. Biddy was never insulting, or capricious, or Biddy to-day and somebody else to-morrow; she would have derived only pain, and no pleasure, from giving me pain; she would far rather have wounded her own breast than mine. How could it be, then, that I did not like her much the better of the two?

"Biddy," said I, when we were walking homeward, "I wish you could put me right."

"I wish I could!" said Biddy.

“If I could only get myself to fall in love with you,—you don’t mind my speaking so openly to such an old acquaintance?”

“Oh dear, not at all!” said Biddy. “Don’t mind me.”

“If I could only get myself to do it, that would be the thing for me.”

“But you never will, you see,” said Biddy.

It did not appear quite so unlikely to me that evening, as it would have done if we had discussed it a few hours before. I therefore observed I was not quite sure of that. But Biddy said she was, and she said it decisively. In my heart I believed her to be right; and yet I took it rather ill, too, that she should be so positive on the point.

When we came near the churchyard, we had to cross an embankment, and get over a stile near a sluice-gate. There started up, from the gate, or from the rushes, or from the ooze (which was quite in his stagnant way), Old Orlick.

“Halloa!” he growled, “where are you two going?”

“Where should we be going, but home?”

“Well, then,” said he, “I’m jiggered if I don’t see you home!”

This penalty of being jiggered was a favorite supposititious case of his. He attached no definite meaning to the word that I am aware of, but used it, like his own pretended Christian name, to affront mankind, and convey an idea of something savagely damaging. When I was younger, I had had a general belief that if he had jiggered me personally, he would have done it with a sharp and twisted hook.

Biddy was much against his going with us, and said to me in a whisper, “Don’t let him come; I don’t like him.” As I did not like him either, I took the liberty of saying that we thanked him, but we didn’t want seeing home. He received that piece of information with a yell of laughter, and dropped back, but came slouching after us at a little distance.

Curious to know whether Biddy suspected him of having had a hand in that murderous attack of which my sister had never been able to give any account, I asked her why she did not like him.

“Oh!” she replied, glancing over her shoulder as he slouched after us, “because I—I am afraid he likes me.”

“Did he ever tell you he liked you?” I asked indignantly.

“No,” said Biddy, glancing over her shoulder again, “he never told me so; but he dances at me, whenever he can catch my eye.”

However novel and peculiar this testimony of attachment, I did not doubt the accuracy of the interpretation. I was very hot indeed upon Old Orlick's daring to admire her; as hot as if it were an outrage on myself.

"But it makes no difference to you, you know," said Biddy, calmly.

"No, Biddy, it makes no difference to me; only I don't like it; I don't approve of it."

"Nor I neither," said Biddy. "Though that makes no difference to you."

"Exactly," said I; "but I must tell you I should have no opinion of you, Biddy, if he danced at you with your own consent."

I kept an eye on Orlick after that night, and, whenever circumstances were favorable to his dancing at Biddy, got before him to obscure that demonstration. He had struck root in Joe's establishment, by reason of my sister's sudden fancy for him, or I should have tried to get him dismissed. He quite understood and reciprocated my good intentions, as I had reason to know thereafter.

And now, because my mind was not confused enough before, I complicated its confusion fifty thousand-fold, by having states and seasons when I was clear that Biddy was immeasurably better than Estella, and that the plain honest working life to which I was born had nothing in it to be ashamed of, but offered me sufficient means of self-respect and happiness. At those times, I would decide conclusively that my disaffection to dear old Joe and the forge was gone, and that I was growing up in a fair way to be partners with Joe and to keep company with Biddy,—when all in a moment some confounding remembrance of the Havisham days would fall upon me like a destructive missile, and scatter my wits again. Scattered wits take a long time picking up; and often before I had got them well together, they would be dispersed in all directions by one stray thought, that perhaps after all Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune when my time was out.

If my time had run out, it would have left me still at the height of my perplexities, I dare say. It never did run out, however, but was brought to a premature end, as I proceed to relate.

Chapter XVIII

IT WAS IN THE fourth year of my apprenticeship to Joe, and it was a Saturday night. There was a group assembled round the fire at the Three Jolly Bargemen, attentive to Mr. Wopsle as he read the newspaper aloud. Of that group I was one.

A highly popular murder had been committed, and Mr. Wopsle was imbrued in blood to the eyebrows. He gloated over every abhorrent adjective in the description, and identified himself with every witness at the Inquest. He faintly moaned, “I am done for,” as the victim, and he barbarously bellowed, “I’ll serve you out,” as the murderer. He gave the medical testimony, in pointed imitation of our local practitioner; and he piped and shook, as the aged turnpike-keeper who had heard blows, to an extent so very paralytic as to suggest a doubt regarding the mental competency of that witness. The coroner, in Mr. Wopsle’s hands, became Timon of Athens; the beadle, Coriolanus. He enjoyed himself thoroughly, and we all enjoyed ourselves, and were delightfully comfortable. In this cosey state of mind we came to the verdict Wilful Murder.

Then, and not sooner, I became aware of a strange gentleman leaning over the back of the settle opposite me, looking on. There was an expression of contempt on his face, and he bit the side of a great forefinger as he watched the group of faces.

“Well!” said the stranger to Mr. Wopsle, when the reading was done, “you have settled it all to your own satisfaction, I have no doubt?”

Everybody started and looked up, as if it were the murderer. He looked at everybody coldly and sarcastically.

“Guilty, of course?” said he. “Out with it. Come!”

“Sir,” returned Mr. Wopsle, “without having the honor of your acquaintance, I do say Guilty.” Upon this we all took courage to unite in a

confirmatory murmur.

“I know you do,” said the stranger; “I knew you would. I told you so. But now I’ll ask you a question. Do you know, or do you not know, that the law of England supposes every man to be innocent, until he is proved—proved—to be guilty?”

“Sir,” Mr. Wopsle began to reply, “as an Englishman myself, I—”

“Come!” said the stranger, biting his forefinger at him. “Don’t evade the question. Either you know it, or you don’t know it. Which is it to be?”

He stood with his head on one side and himself on one side, in a bullying, interrogative manner, and he threw his forefinger at Mr. Wopsle, —as it were to mark him out—before biting it again.

“Now!” said he. “Do you know it, or don’t you know it?”

“Certainly I know it,” replied Mr. Wopsle.

“Certainly you know it. Then why didn’t you say so at first? Now, I’ll ask you another question,”—taking possession of Mr. Wopsle, as if he had a right to him,—“do you know that none of these witnesses have yet been cross-examined?”

Mr. Wopsle was beginning, “I can only say—” when the stranger stopped him.

“What? You won’t answer the question, yes or no? Now, I’ll try you again.” Throwing his finger at him again. “Attend to me. Are you aware, or are you not aware, that none of these witnesses have yet been cross-examined? Come, I only want one word from you. Yes, or no?”

Mr. Wopsle hesitated, and we all began to conceive rather a poor opinion of him.

“Come!” said the stranger, “I’ll help you. You don’t deserve help, but I’ll help you. Look at that paper you hold in your hand. What is it?”

“What is it?” repeated Mr. Wopsle, eyeing it, much at a loss.

“Is it,” pursued the stranger in his most sarcastic and suspicious manner, “the printed paper you have just been reading from?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Undoubtedly. Now, turn to that paper, and tell me whether it distinctly states that the prisoner expressly said that his legal advisers instructed him altogether to reserve his defence?”

“I read that just now,” Mr. Wopsle pleaded.

“Never mind what you read just now, sir; I don’t ask you what you read

just now. You may read the Lord's Prayer backwards, if you like,—and, perhaps, have done it before to-day. Turn to the paper. No, no, no my friend; not to the top of the column; you know better than that; to the bottom, to the bottom." (We all began to think Mr. Wopsle full of subterfuge.) "Well? Have you found it?"

"Here it is," said Mr. Wopsle.

"Now, follow that passage with your eye, and tell me whether it distinctly states that the prisoner expressly said that he was instructed by his legal advisers wholly to reserve his defence? Come! Do you make that of it?"

Mr. Wopsle answered, "Those are not the exact words."

"Not the exact words!" repeated the gentleman bitterly. "Is that the exact substance?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wopsle.

"Yes," repeated the stranger, looking round at the rest of the company with his right hand extended towards the witness, Wopsle. "And now I ask you what you say to the conscience of that man who, with that passage before his eyes, can lay his head upon his pillow after having pronounced a fellow-creature guilty, unheard?"

We all began to suspect that Mr. Wopsle was not the man we had thought him, and that he was beginning to be found out.

"And that same man, remember," pursued the gentleman, throwing his finger at Mr. Wopsle heavily,—"that same man might be summoned as a juryman upon this very trial, and, having thus deeply committed himself, might return to the bosom of his family and lay his head upon his pillow, after deliberately swearing that he would well and truly try the issue joined between Our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, and would a true verdict give according to the evidence, so help him God!"

We were all deeply persuaded that the unfortunate Wopsle had gone too far, and had better stop in his reckless career while there was yet time.

The strange gentleman, with an air of authority not to be disputed, and with a manner expressive of knowing something secret about every one of us that would effectually do for each individual if he chose to disclose it, left the back of the settle, and came into the space between the two settles, in front of the fire, where he remained standing, his left hand in his pocket, and he biting the forefinger of his right.

“From information I have received,” said he, looking round at us as we all quailed before him, “I have reason to believe there is a blacksmith among you, by name Joseph—or Joe—Gargery. Which is the man?”

“Here is the man,” said Joe.

The strange gentleman beckoned him out of his place, and Joe went.

“You have an apprentice,” pursued the stranger, “commonly known as Pip? Is he here?”

“I am here!” I cried.

The stranger did not recognize me, but I recognized him as the gentleman I had met on the stairs, on the occasion of my second visit to Miss Havisham. I had known him the moment I saw him looking over the settle, and now that I stood confronting him with his hand upon my shoulder, I checked off again in detail his large head, his dark complexion, his deep-set eyes, his bushy black eyebrows, his large watch-chain, his strong black dots of beard and whisker, and even the smell of scented soap on his great hand.

“I wish to have a private conference with you two,” said he, when he had surveyed me at his leisure. “It will take a little time. Perhaps we had better go to your place of residence. I prefer not to anticipate my communication here; you will impart as much or as little of it as you please to your friends afterwards; I have nothing to do with that.”

Amidst a wondering silence, we three walked out of the Jolly Bargemen, and in a wondering silence walked home. While going along, the strange gentleman occasionally looked at me, and occasionally bit the side of his finger. As we neared home, Joe vaguely acknowledging the occasion as an impressive and ceremonious one, went on ahead to open the front door. Our conference was held in the state parlor, which was feebly lighted by one candle.

It began with the strange gentleman’s sitting down at the table, drawing the candle to him, and looking over some entries in his pocket-book. He then put up the pocket-book and set the candle a little aside, after peering round it into the darkness at Joe and me, to ascertain which was which.

“My name,” he said, “is Jaggers, and I am a lawyer in London. I am pretty well known. I have unusual business to transact with you, and I commence by explaining that it is not of my originating. If my advice had been asked, I should not have been here. It was not asked, and you see me

here. What I have to do as the confidential agent of another, I do. No less, no more."

Finding that he could not see us very well from where he sat, he got up, and threw one leg over the back of a chair and leaned upon it; thus having one foot on the seat of the chair, and one foot on the ground.

"Now, Joseph Gargery, I am the bearer of an offer to relieve you of this young fellow your apprentice. You would not object to cancel his indentures at his request and for his good? You would want nothing for so doing?"

"Lord forbid that I should want anything for not standing in Pip's way," said Joe, staring.

"Lord forbidding is pious, but not to the purpose," returned Mr. Jaggers. "The question is, Would you want anything? Do you want anything?"

"The answer is," returned Joe, sternly, "No."

I thought Mr. Jaggers glanced at Joe, as if he considered him a fool for his disinterestedness. But I was too much bewildered between breathless curiosity and surprise, to be sure of it.

"Very well," said Mr. Jaggers. "Recollect the admission you have made, and don't try to go from it presently."

"Who's a going to try?" retorted Joe.

"I don't say anybody is. Do you keep a dog?"

"Yes, I do keep a dog."

"Bear in mind then, that Brag is a good dog, but Holdfast is a better. Bear that in mind, will you?" repeated Mr. Jaggers, shutting his eyes and nodding his head at Joe, as if he were forgiving him something. "Now, I return to this young fellow. And the communication I have got to make is, that he has Great Expectations."

Joe and I gasped, and looked at one another.

"I am instructed to communicate to him," said Mr. Jaggers, throwing his finger at me sideways, "that he will come into a handsome property. Further, that it is the desire of the present possessor of that property, that he be immediately removed from his present sphere of life and from this place, and be brought up as a gentleman,—in a word, as a young fellow of great expectations."

My dream was out; my wild fancy was surpassed by sober reality; Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale.

“Now, Mr. Pip,” pursued the lawyer, “I address the rest of what I have to say, to you. You are to understand, first, that it is the request of the person from whom I take my instructions that you always bear the name of Pip. You will have no objection, I dare say, to your great expectations being encumbered with that easy condition. But if you have any objection, this is the time to mention it.”

My heart was beating so fast, and there was such a singing in my ears, that I could scarcely stammer I had no objection.

“I should think not! Now you are to understand, secondly, Mr. Pip, that the name of the person who is your liberal benefactor remains a profound secret, until the person chooses to reveal it. I am empowered to mention that it is the intention of the person to reveal it at first hand by word of mouth to yourself. When or where that intention may be carried out, I cannot say; no one can say. It may be years hence. Now, you are distinctly to understand that you are most positively prohibited from making any inquiry on this head, or any allusion or reference, however distant, to any individual whomsoever as the individual, in all the communications you may have with me. If you have a suspicion in your own breast, keep that suspicion in your own breast. It is not the least to the purpose what the reasons of this prohibition are; they may be the strongest and gravest reasons, or they may be mere whim. This is not for you to inquire into. The condition is laid down. Your acceptance of it, and your observance of it as binding, is the only remaining condition that I am charged with, by the person from whom I take my instructions, and for whom I am not otherwise responsible. That person is the person from whom you derive your expectations, and the secret is solely held by that person and by me. Again, not a very difficult condition with which to encumber such a rise in fortune; but if you have any objection to it, this is the time to mention it. Speak out.”

Once more, I stammered with difficulty that I had no objection.

“I should think not! Now, Mr. Pip, I have done with stipulations.” Though he called me Mr. Pip, and began rather to make up to me, he still could not get rid of a certain air of bullying suspicion; and even now he occasionally shut his eyes and threw his finger at me while he spoke, as much as to express that he knew all kinds of things to my disparagement, if he only chose to mention them. “We come next, to mere details of arrangement. You must know that, although I have used the term

‘expectations’ more than once, you are not endowed with expectations only. There is already lodged in my hands a sum of money amply sufficient for your suitable education and maintenance. You will please consider me your guardian. Oh!” for I was going to thank him, “I tell you at once, I am paid for my services, or I shouldn’t render them. It is considered that you must be better educated, in accordance with your altered position, and that you will be alive to the importance and necessity of at once entering on that advantage.”

I said I had always longed for it.

“Never mind what you have always longed for, Mr. Pip,” he retorted; “keep to the record. If you long for it now, that’s enough. Am I answered that you are ready to be placed at once under some proper tutor? Is that it?”

I stammered yes, that was it.

“Good. Now, your inclinations are to be consulted. I don’t think that wise, mind, but it’s my trust. Have you ever heard of any tutor whom you would prefer to another?”

I had never heard of any tutor but Biddy and Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt; so, I replied in the negative.

“There is a certain tutor, of whom I have some knowledge, who I think might suit the purpose,” said Mr. Jaggers. “I don’t recommend him, observe; because I never recommend anybody. The gentleman I speak of is one Mr. Matthew Pocket.”

Ah! I caught at the name directly. Miss Havisham’s relation. The Matthew whom Mr. and Mrs. Camilla had spoken of. The Matthew whose place was to be at Miss Havisham’s head, when she lay dead, in her bride’s dress on the bride’s table.

“You know the name?” said Mr. Jaggers, looking shrewdly at me, and then shutting up his eyes while he waited for my answer.

My answer was, that I had heard of the name.

“Oh!” said he. “You have heard of the name. But the question is, what do you say of it?”

I said, or tried to say, that I was much obliged to him for his recommendation—

“No, my young friend!” he interrupted, shaking his great head very slowly. “Recollect yourself!”

Not recollecting myself, I began again that I was much obliged to him

for his recommendation—

"No, my young friend," he interrupted, shaking his head and frowning and smiling both at once,—"no, no, no; it's very well done, but it won't do; you are too young to fix me with it. Recommendation is not the word, Mr. Pip. Try another."

Correcting myself, I said that I was much obliged to him for his mention of Mr. Matthew Pocket—

"That's more like it!" cried Mr. Jaggers.—And (I added), I would gladly try that gentleman.

"Good. You had better try him in his own house. The way shall be prepared for you, and you can see his son first, who is in London. When will you come to London?"

I said (glancing at Joe, who stood looking on, motionless), that I supposed I could come directly.

"First," said Mr. Jaggers, "you should have some new clothes to come in, and they should not be working-clothes. Say this day week. You'll want some money. Shall I leave you twenty guineas?"

He produced a long purse, with the greatest coolness, and counted them out on the table and pushed them over to me. This was the first time he had taken his leg from the chair. He sat astride of the chair when he had pushed the money over, and sat swinging his purse and eyeing Joe.

"Well, Joseph Gargery? You look dumbfoundered?"

"I am!" said Joe, in a very decided manner.

"It was understood that you wanted nothing for yourself, remember?"

"It were understood," said Joe. "And it are understood. And it ever will be similar according."

"But what," said Mr. Jaggers, swinging his purse,—"what if it was in my instructions to make you a present, as compensation?"

"As compensation what for?" Joe demanded.

"For the loss of his services."

Joe laid his hand upon my shoulder with the touch of a woman. I have often thought him since, like the steam-hammer that can crush a man or pat an egg-shell, in his combination of strength with gentleness. "Pip is that hearty welcome," said Joe, "to go free with his services, to honor and fortun', as no words can tell him. But if you think as Money can make compensation to me for the loss of the little child—what come to the forge

—and ever the best of friends!—”

O dear good Joe, whom I was so ready to leave and so unthankful to, I see you again, with your muscular blacksmith’s arm before your eyes, and your broad chest heaving, and your voice dying away. O dear good faithful tender Joe, I feel the loving tremble of your hand upon my arm, as solemnly this day as if it had been the rustle of an angel’s wing!

But I encouraged Joe at the time. I was lost in the mazes of my future fortunes, and could not retrace the by-paths we had trodden together. I begged Joe to be comforted, for (as he said) we had ever been the best of friends, and (as I said) we ever would be so. Joe scooped his eyes with his disengaged wrist, as if he were bent on gouging himself, but said not another word.

Mr. Jaggers had looked on at this, as one who recognized in Joe the village idiot, and in me his keeper. When it was over, he said, weighing in his hand the purse he had ceased to swing:—

“Now, Joseph Gargery, I warn you this is your last chance. No half measures with me. If you mean to take a present that I have it in charge to make you, speak out, and you shall have it. If on the contrary you mean to say—” Here, to his great amazement, he was stopped by Joe’s suddenly working round him with every demonstration of a fell pugilistic purpose.

“Which I meantersay,” cried Joe, “that if you come into my place bull-baiting and badgering me, come out! Which I meantersay as sech if you’re a man, come on! Which I meantersay that what I say, I meantersay and stand or fall by!”

I drew Joe away, and he immediately became placable; merely stating to me, in an obliging manner and as a polite expostulatory notice to any one whom it might happen to concern, that he were not a going to be bull-baited and badgered in his own place. Mr. Jaggers had risen when Joe demonstrated, and had backed near the door. Without evincing any inclination to come in again, he there delivered his valedictory remarks. They were these.

“Well, Mr. Pip, I think the sooner you leave here—as you are to be a gentleman—the better. Let it stand for this day week, and you shall receive my printed address in the meantime. You can take a hackney-coach at the stage-coach office in London, and come straight to me. Understand, that I express no opinion, one way or other, on the trust I undertake. I am paid for

undertaking it, and I do so. Now, understand that, finally. Understand that!”

He was throwing his finger at both of us, and I think would have gone on, but for his seeming to think Joe dangerous, and going off.

Something came into my head which induced me to run after him, as he was going down to the Jolly Bargemen, where he had left a hired carriage.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Jaggers.”

“Halloa!” said he, facing round, “what’s the matter?”

“I wish to be quite right, Mr. Jaggers, and to keep to your directions; so I thought I had better ask. Would there be any objection to my taking leave of any one I know, about here, before I go away?”

“No,” said he, looking as if he hardly understood me.

“I don’t mean in the village only, but up town?”

“No,” said he. “No objection.”

I thanked him and ran home again, and there I found that Joe had already locked the front door and vacated the state parlor, and was seated by the kitchen fire with a hand on each knee, gazing intently at the burning coals. I too sat down before the fire and gazed at the coals, and nothing was said for a long time.

My sister was in her cushioned chair in her corner, and Biddy sat at her needle-work before the fire, and Joe sat next Biddy, and I sat next Joe in the corner opposite my sister. The more I looked into the glowing coals, the more incapable I became of looking at Joe; the longer the silence lasted, the more unable I felt to speak.

At length I got out, “Joe, have you told Biddy?”

“No, Pip,” returned Joe, still looking at the fire, and holding his knees tight, as if he had private information that they intended to make off somewhere, “which I left it to yourself, Pip.”

“I would rather you told, Joe.”

“Pip’s a gentleman of fortun’ then,” said Joe, “and God bless him in it!”

Biddy dropped her work, and looked at me. Joe held his knees and looked at me. I looked at both of them. After a pause, they both heartily congratulated me; but there was a certain touch of sadness in their congratulations that I rather resented.

I took it upon myself to impress Biddy (and through Biddy, Joe) with the grave obligation I considered my friends under, to know nothing and say nothing about the maker of my fortune. It would all come out in good time,

I observed, and in the meanwhile nothing was to be said, save that I had come into great expectations from a mysterious patron. Biddy nodded her head thoughtfully at the fire as she took up her work again, and said she would be very particular; and Joe, still detaining his knees, said, “Ay, ay, I’ll be ekervally partickler, Pip;” and then they congratulated me again, and went on to express so much wonder at the notion of my being a gentleman that I didn’t half like it.

Infinite pains were then taken by Biddy to convey to my sister some idea of what had happened. To the best of my belief, those efforts entirely failed. She laughed and nodded her head a great many times, and even repeated after Biddy, the words “Pip” and “Property.” But I doubt if they had more meaning in them than an election cry, and I cannot suggest a darker picture of her state of mind.

I never could have believed it without experience, but as Joe and Biddy became more at their cheerful ease again, I became quite gloomy. Dissatisfied with my fortune, of course I could not be; but it is possible that I may have been, without quite knowing it, dissatisfied with myself.

Any how, I sat with my elbow on my knee and my face upon my hand, looking into the fire, as those two talked about my going away, and about what they should do without me, and all that. And whenever I caught one of them looking at me, though never so pleasantly (and they often looked at me,—particularly Biddy), I felt offended: as if they were expressing some mistrust of me. Though Heaven knows they never did by word or sign.

At those times I would get up and look out at the door; for our kitchen door opened at once upon the night, and stood open on summer evenings to air the room. The very stars to which I then raised my eyes, I am afraid I took to be but poor and humble stars for glittering on the rustic objects among which I had passed my life.

“Saturday night,” said I, when we sat at our supper of bread and cheese and beer. “Five more days, and then the day before the day! They’ll soon go.”

“Yes, Pip,” observed Joe, whose voice sounded hollow in his beer-mug. “They’ll soon go.”

“Soon, soon go,” said Biddy.

“I have been thinking, Joe, that when I go down town on Monday, and order my new clothes, I shall tell the tailor that I’ll come and put them on

there, or that I'll have them sent to Mr. Pumblechook's. It would be very disagreeable to be stared at by all the people here."

"Mr. and Mrs. Hubble might like to see you in your new gen-teel figure too, Pip," said Joe, industriously cutting his bread, with his cheese on it, in the palm of his left hand, and glancing at my untasted supper as if he thought of the time when we used to compare slices. "So might Wopsle. And the Jolly Bargemen might take it as a compliment."

"That's just what I don't want, Joe. They would make such a business of it,—such a coarse and common business,—that I couldn't bear myself."

"Ah, that indeed, Pip!" said Joe. "If you couldn't abear yourself—"

Biddy asked me here, as she sat holding my sister's plate, "Have you thought about when you'll show yourself to Mr. Gargery, and your sister and me? You will show yourself to us; won't you?"

"Biddy," I returned with some resentment, "you are so exceedingly quick that it's difficult to keep up with you."

("She always were quick," observed Joe.)

"If you had waited another moment, Biddy, you would have heard me say that I shall bring my clothes here in a bundle one evening,—most likely on the evening before I go away."

Biddy said no more. Handsomely forgiving her, I soon exchanged an affectionate good night with her and Joe, and went up to bed. When I got into my little room, I sat down and took a long look at it, as a mean little room that I should soon be parted from and raised above, for ever. It was furnished with fresh young remembrances too, and even at the same moment I fell into much the same confused division of mind between it and the better rooms to which I was going, as I had been in so often between the forge and Miss Havisham's, and Biddy and Estella.

The sun had been shining brightly all day on the roof of my attic, and the room was warm. As I put the window open and stood looking out, I saw Joe come slowly forth at the dark door, below, and take a turn or two in the air; and then I saw Biddy come, and bring him a pipe and light it for him. He never smoked so late, and it seemed to hint to me that he wanted comforting, for some reason or other.

He presently stood at the door immediately beneath me, smoking his pipe, and Biddy stood there too, quietly talking to him, and I knew that they talked of me, for I heard my name mentioned in an endearing tone by both

of them more than once. I would not have listened for more, if I could have heard more; so I drew away from the window, and sat down in my one chair by the bedside, feeling it very sorrowful and strange that this first night of my bright fortunes should be the loneliest I had ever known.

Looking towards the open window, I saw light wreaths from Joe's pipe floating there, and I fancied it was like a blessing from Joe,—not obtruded on me or paraded before me, but pervading the air we shared together. I put my light out, and crept into bed; and it was an uneasy bed now, and I never slept the old sound sleep in it any more.

Chapter XIX

MORNING MADE A CONSIDERABLE difference in my general prospect of Life, and brightened it so much that it scarcely seemed the same. What lay heaviest on my mind was, the consideration that six days intervened between me and the day of departure; for I could not divest myself of a misgiving that something might happen to London in the meanwhile, and that, when I got there, it would be either greatly deteriorated or clean gone.

Joe and Biddy were very sympathetic and pleasant when I spoke of our approaching separation; but they only referred to it when I did. After breakfast, Joe brought out my indentures from the press in the best parlor, and we put them in the fire, and I felt that I was free. With all the novelty of my emancipation on me, I went to church with Joe, and thought perhaps the clergyman wouldn't have read that about the rich man and the kingdom of Heaven, if he had known all.

After our early dinner, I strolled out alone, purposing to finish off the marshes at once, and get them done with. As I passed the church, I felt (as I had felt during service in the morning) a sublime compassion for the poor creatures who were destined to go there, Sunday after Sunday, all their lives through, and to lie obscurely at last among the low green mounds. I promised myself that I would do something for them one of these days, and formed a plan in outline for bestowing a dinner of roast-beef and plum-pudding, a pint of ale, and a gallon of condescension, upon everybody in the village.

If I had often thought before, with something allied to shame, of my companionship with the fugitive whom I had once seen limping among those graves, what were my thoughts on this Sunday, when the place recalled the wretch, ragged and shivering, with his felon iron and badge! My comfort was, that it happened a long time ago, and that he had

doubtless been transported a long way off, and that he was dead to me, and might be veritably dead into the bargain.

No more low, wet grounds, no more dikes and sluices, no more of these grazing cattle,—though they seemed, in their dull manner, to wear a more respectful air now, and to face round, in order that they might stare as long as possible at the possessor of such great expectations,—farewell, monotonous acquaintances of my childhood, henceforth I was for London and greatness; not for smith's work in general, and for you! I made my exultant way to the old Battery, and, lying down there to consider the question whether Miss Havisham intended me for Estella, fell asleep.

When I awoke, I was much surprised to find Joe sitting beside me, smoking his pipe. He greeted me with a cheerful smile on my opening my eyes, and said,—

"As being the last time, Pip, I thought I'd foller."

"And Joe, I am very glad you did so."

"Thankee, Pip."

"You may be sure, dear Joe," I went on, after we had shaken hands, "that I shall never forget you."

"No, no, Pip!" said Joe, in a comfortable tone, "I'm sure of that. Ay, ay, old chap! Bless you, it were only necessary to get it well round in a man's mind, to be certain on it. But it took a bit of time to get it well round, the change come so oncommon plump; didn't it?"

Somehow, I was not best pleased with Joe's being so mightily secure of me. I should have liked him to have betrayed emotion, or to have said, "It does you credit, Pip," or something of that sort. Therefore, I made no remark on Joe's first head; merely saying as to his second, that the tidings had indeed come suddenly, but that I had always wanted to be a gentleman, and had often and often speculated on what I would do, if I were one.

"Have you though?" said Joe. "Astonishing!"

"It's a pity now, Joe," said I, "that you did not get on a little more, when we had our lessons here; isn't it?"

"Well, I don't know," returned Joe. "I'm so awful dull. I'm only master of my own trade. It were always a pity as I was so awful dull; but it's no more of a pity now, than it was—this day twelvemonth—don't you see?"

What I had meant was, that when I came into my property and was able to do something for Joe, it would have been much more agreeable if he had

been better qualified for a rise in station. He was so perfectly innocent of my meaning, however, that I thought I would mention it to Biddy in preference.

So, when we had walked home and had had tea, I took Biddy into our little garden by the side of the lane, and, after throwing out in a general way for the elevation of her spirits, that I should never forget her, said I had a favor to ask of her.

"And it is, Biddy," said I, "that you will not omit any opportunity of helping Joe on, a little."

"How helping him on?" asked Biddy, with a steady sort of glance.

"Well! Joe is a dear good fellow,—in fact, I think he is the dearest fellow that ever lived,—but he is rather backward in some things. For instance, Biddy, in his learning and his manners."

Although I was looking at Biddy as I spoke, and although she opened her eyes very wide when I had spoken, she did not look at me.

"O, his manners! won't his manners do then?" asked Biddy, plucking a black-currant leaf.

"My dear Biddy, they do very well here—"

"O! they do very well here?" interrupted Biddy, looking closely at the leaf in her hand.

"Hear me out,—but if I were to remove Joe into a higher sphere, as I shall hope to remove him when I fully come into my property, they would hardly do him justice."

"And don't you think he knows that?" asked Biddy.

It was such a very provoking question (for it had never in the most distant manner occurred to me), that I said, snappishly,—

"Biddy, what do you mean?"

Biddy, having rubbed the leaf to pieces between her hands,—and the smell of a black-currant bush has ever since recalled to me that evening in the little garden by the side of the lane,—said, "Have you never considered that he may be proud?"

"Proud?" I repeated, with disdainful emphasis.

"O! there are many kinds of pride," said Biddy, looking full at me and shaking her head; "pride is not all of one kind—"

"Well? What are you stopping for?" said I.

"Not all of one kind," resumed Biddy. "He may be too proud to let any

one take him out of a place that he is competent to fill, and fills well and with respect. To tell you the truth, I think he is; though it sounds bold in me to say so, for you must know him far better than I do."

"Now, Biddy," said I, "I am very sorry to see this in you. I did not expect to see this in you. You are envious, Biddy, and grudging. You are dissatisfied on account of my rise in fortune, and you can't help showing it."

"If you have the heart to think so," returned Biddy, "say so. Say so over and over again, if you have the heart to think so."

"If you have the heart to be so, you mean, Biddy," said I, in a virtuous and superior tone; "don't put it off upon me. I am very sorry to see it, and it's a—it's a bad side of human nature. I did intend to ask you to use any little opportunities you might have after I was gone, of improving dear Joe. But after this I ask you nothing. I am extremely sorry to see this in you, Biddy," I repeated. "It's a—it's a bad side of human nature."

"Whether you scold me or approve of me," returned poor Biddy, "you may equally depend upon my trying to do all that lies in my power, here, at all times. And whatever opinion you take away of me, shall make no difference in my remembrance of you. Yet a gentleman should not be unjust neither," said Biddy, turning away her head.

I again warmly repeated that it was a bad side of human nature (in which sentiment, waiving its application, I have since seen reason to think I was right), and I walked down the little path away from Biddy, and Biddy went into the house, and I went out at the garden gate and took a dejected stroll until supper-time; again feeling it very sorrowful and strange that this, the second night of my bright fortunes, should be as lonely and unsatisfactory as the first.

But, morning once more brightened my view, and I extended my clemency to Biddy, and we dropped the subject. Putting on the best clothes I had, I went into town as early as I could hope to find the shops open, and presented myself before Mr. Trabb, the tailor, who was having his breakfast in the parlor behind his shop, and who did not think it worth his while to come out to me, but called me in to him.

"Well!" said Mr. Trabb, in a hail-fellow-well-met kind of way. "How are you, and what can I do for you?"

Mr. Trabb had sliced his hot roll into three feather-beds, and was slipping

butter in between the blankets, and covering it up. He was a prosperous old bachelor, and his open window looked into a prosperous little garden and orchard, and there was a prosperous iron safe let into the wall at the side of his fireplace, and I did not doubt that heaps of his prosperity were put away in it in bags.

"Mr. Trabb," said I, "it's an unpleasant thing to have to mention, because it looks like boasting; but I have come into a handsome property."

A change passed over Mr. Trabb. He forgot the butter in bed, got up from the bedside, and wiped his fingers on the tablecloth, exclaiming, "Lord bless my soul!"

"I am going up to my guardian in London," said I, casually drawing some guineas out of my pocket and looking at them; "and I want a fashionable suit of clothes to go in. I wish to pay for them," I added—otherwise I thought he might only pretend to make them, "with ready money."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Trabb, as he respectfully bent his body, opened his arms, and took the liberty of touching me on the outside of each elbow, "don't hurt me by mentioning that. May I venture to congratulate you? Would you do me the favor of stepping into the shop?"

Mr. Trabb's boy was the most audacious boy in all that country-side. When I had entered he was sweeping the shop, and he had sweetened his labors by sweeping over me. He was still sweeping when I came out into the shop with Mr. Trabb, and he knocked the broom against all possible corners and obstacles, to express (as I understood it) equality with any blacksmith, alive or dead.

"Hold that noise," said Mr. Trabb, with the greatest sternness, "or I'll knock your head off!— Do me the favor to be seated, sir. Now, this," said Mr. Trabb, taking down a roll of cloth, and tiding it out in a flowing manner over the counter, preparatory to getting his hand under it to show the gloss, "is a very sweet article. I can recommend it for your purpose, sir, because it really is extra super. But you shall see some others. Give me Number Four, you!" (To the boy, and with a dreadfully severe stare; foreseeing the danger of that miscreant's brushing me with it, or making some other sign of familiarity.)

Mr. Trabb never removed his stern eye from the boy until he had deposited number four on the counter and was at a safe distance again.

Then he commanded him to bring number five, and number eight. “And let me have none of your tricks here,” said Mr. Trabb, “or you shall repent it, you young scoundrel, the longest day you have to live.”

Mr. Trabb then bent over number four, and in a sort of deferential confidence recommended it to me as a light article for summer wear, an article much in vogue among the nobility and gentry, an article that it would ever be an honor to him to reflect upon a distinguished fellow-townsman’s (if he might claim me for a fellow-townsman) having worn. “Are you bringing numbers five and eight, you vagabond,” said Mr. Trabb to the boy after that, “or shall I kick you out of the shop and bring them myself?”

I selected the materials for a suit, with the assistance of Mr. Trabb’s judgment, and re-entered the parlor to be measured. For although Mr. Trabb had my measure already, and had previously been quite contented with it, he said apologetically that it “wouldn’t do under existing circumstances, sir, —wouldn’t do at all.” So, Mr. Trabb measured and calculated me in the parlor, as if I were an estate and he the finest species of surveyor, and gave himself such a world of trouble that I felt that no suit of clothes could possibly remunerate him for his pains. When he had at last done and had appointed to send the articles to Mr. Pumblechook’s on the Thursday evening, he said, with his hand upon the parlor lock, “I know, sir, that London gentlemen cannot be expected to patronize local work, as a rule; but if you would give me a turn now and then in the quality of a townsman, I should greatly esteem it. Good morning, sir, much obliged.—Door!”

The last word was flung at the boy, who had not the least notion what it meant. But I saw him collapse as his master rubbed me out with his hands, and my first decided experience of the stupendous power of money was, that it had morally laid upon his back Trabb’s boy.

After this memorable event, I went to the hatter’s, and the bootmaker’s, and the hosier’s, and felt rather like Mother Hubbard’s dog whose outfit required the services of so many trades. I also went to the coach-office and took my place for seven o’clock on Saturday morning. It was not necessary to explain everywhere that I had come into a handsome property; but whenever I said anything to that effect, it followed that the officiating tradesman ceased to have his attention diverted through the window by the High Street, and concentrated his mind upon me. When I had ordered everything I wanted, I directed my steps towards Pumblechook’s, and, as I

approached that gentleman's place of business, I saw him standing at his door.

He was waiting for me with great impatience. He had been out early with the chaise-cart, and had called at the forge and heard the news. He had prepared a collation for me in the Barnwell parlor, and he too ordered his shopman to "come out of the gangway" as my sacred person passed.

"My dear friend," said Mr. Pumblechook, taking me by both hands, when he and I and the collation were alone, "I give you joy of your good fortune. Well deserved, well deserved!"

This was coming to the point, and I thought it a sensible way of expressing himself.

"To think," said Mr. Pumblechook, after snorting admiration at me for some moments, "that I should have been the humble instrument of leading up to this, is a proud reward."

I begged Mr. Pumblechook to remember that nothing was to be ever said or hinted, on that point.

"My dear young friend," said Mr. Pumblechook; "if you will allow me to call you so—"

I murmured "Certainly," and Mr. Pumblechook took me by both hands again, and communicated a movement to his waistcoat, which had an emotional appearance, though it was rather low down, "My dear young friend, rely upon my doing my little all in your absence, by keeping the fact before the mind of Joseph.— Joseph!" said Mr. Pumblechook, in the way of a compassionate adjuration. "Joseph!! Joseph!!!" Thereupon he shook his head and tapped it, expressing his sense of deficiency in Joseph.

"But my dear young friend," said Mr. Pumblechook, "you must be hungry, you must be exhausted. Be seated. Here is a chicken had round from the Boar, here is a tongue had round from the Boar, here's one or two little things had round from the Boar, that I hope you may not despise. But do I," said Mr. Pumblechook, getting up again the moment after he had sat down, "see afore me, him as I ever sported with in his times of happy infancy? And may I—may I—?"

This May I, meant might he shake hands? I consented, and he was fervent, and then sat down again.

"Here is wine," said Mr. Pumblechook. "Let us drink, Thanks to Fortune, and may she ever pick out her favorites with equal judgment! And yet I

cannot," said Mr. Pumblechook, getting up again, "see afore me One—and likewise drink to One—without again expressing—May I—may I—?"

I said he might, and he shook hands with me again, and emptied his glass and turned it upside down. I did the same; and if I had turned myself upside down before drinking, the wine could not have gone more direct to my head.

Mr. Pumblechook helped me to the liver wing, and to the best slice of tongue (none of those out-of-the-way No Thoroughfares of Pork now), and took, comparatively speaking, no care of himself at all. "Ah! poultry, poultry! You little thought," said Mr. Pumblechook, apostrophizing the fowl in the dish, "when you was a young fledgling, what was in store for you. You little thought you was to be refreshment beneath this humble roof for one as— Call it a weakness, if you will," said Mr. Pumblechook, getting up again, "but may I? may I—?"

It began to be unnecessary to repeat the form of saying he might, so he did it at once. How he ever did it so often without wounding himself with my knife, I don't know.

"And your sister," he resumed, after a little steady eating, "which had the honor of bringing you up by hand! It's a sad picter, to reflect that she's no longer equal to fully understanding the honor. May—"

I saw he was about to come at me again, and I stopped him.

"We'll drink her health," said I.

"Ah!" cried Mr. Pumblechook, leaning back in his chair, quite flaccid with admiration, "that's the way you know 'em, sir!" (I don't know who Sir was, but he certainly was not I, and there was no third person present); "that's the way you know the noble-minded, sir! Ever forgiving and ever affable. It might," said the servile Pumblechook, putting down his untasted glass in a hurry and getting up again, "to a common person, have the appearance of repeating—but may I—?"

When he had done it, he resumed his seat and drank to my sister. "Let us never be blind," said Mr. Pumblechook, "to her faults of temper, but it is to be hoped she meant well."

At about this time, I began to observe that he was getting flushed in the face; as to myself, I felt all face, steeped in wine and smarting.

I mentioned to Mr. Pumblechook that I wished to have my new clothes sent to his house, and he was ecstatic on my so distinguishing him. I

mentioned my reason for desiring to avoid observation in the village, and he lauded it to the skies. There was nobody but himself, he intimated, worthy of my confidence, and—in short, might he? Then he asked me tenderly if I remembered our boyish games at sums, and how we had gone together to have me bound apprentice, and, in effect, how he had ever been my favorite fancy and my chosen friend? If I had taken ten times as many glasses of wine as I had, I should have known that he never had stood in that relation towards me, and should in my heart of hearts have repudiated the idea. Yet for all that, I remember feeling convinced that I had been much mistaken in him, and that he was a sensible, practical, good-hearted prime fellow.

By degrees he fell to reposing such great confidence in me, as to ask my advice in reference to his own affairs. He mentioned that there was an opportunity for a great amalgamation and monopoly of the corn and seed trade on those premises, if enlarged, such as had never occurred before in that or any other neighborhood. What alone was wanting to the realization of a vast fortune, he considered to be More Capital. Those were the two little words, more capital. Now it appeared to him (Pumblechook) that if that capital were got into the business, through a sleeping partner, sir,—which sleeping partner would have nothing to do but walk in, by self or deputy, whenever he pleased, and examine the books,—and walk in twice a year and take his profits away in his pocket, to the tune of fifty per cent,—it appeared to him that that might be an opening for a young gentleman of spirit combined with property, which would be worthy of his attention. But what did I think? He had great confidence in my opinion, and what did I think? I gave it as my opinion. “Wait a bit!” The united vastness and distinctness of this view so struck him, that he no longer asked if he might shake hands with me, but said he really must,—and did.

We drank all the wine, and Mr. Pumblechook pledged himself over and over again to keep Joseph up to the mark (I don’t know what mark), and to render me efficient and constant service (I don’t know what service). He also made known to me for the first time in my life, and certainly after having kept his secret wonderfully well, that he had always said of me, “That boy is no common boy, and mark me, his fortun’ will be no common fortun’.” He said with a tearful smile that it was a singular thing to think of now, and I said so too. Finally, I went out into the air, with a dim perception that there was something unwonted in the conduct of the sunshine, and

found that I had slumberously got to the turnpike without having taken any account of the road.

There, I was roused by Mr. Pumblechook's hailing me. He was a long way down the sunny street, and was making expressive gestures for me to stop. I stopped, and he came up breathless.

"No, my dear friend," said he, when he had recovered wind for speech. "Not if I can help it. This occasion shall not entirely pass without that affability on your part.— May I, as an old friend and well-wisher? May I?"

We shook hands for the hundredth time at least, and he ordered a young carter out of my way with the greatest indignation. Then, he blessed me and stood waving his hand to me until I had passed the crook in the road; and then I turned into a field and had a long nap under a hedge before I pursued my way home.

I had scant luggage to take with me to London, for little of the little I possessed was adapted to my new station. But I began packing that same afternoon, and wildly packed up things that I knew I should want next morning, in a fiction that there was not a moment to be lost.

So, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, passed; and on Friday morning I went to Mr. Pumblechook's, to put on my new clothes and pay my visit to Miss Havisham. Mr. Pumblechook's own room was given up to me to dress in, and was decorated with clean towels expressly for the event. My clothes were rather a disappointment, of course. Probably every new and eagerly expected garment ever put on since clothes came in, fell a trifle short of the wearer's expectation. But after I had had my new suit on some half an hour, and had gone through an immensity of posturing with Mr. Pumblechook's very limited dressing-glass, in the futile endeavor to see my legs, it seemed to fit me better. It being market morning at a neighboring town some ten miles off, Mr. Pumblechook was not at home. I had not told him exactly when I meant to leave, and was not likely to shake hands with him again before departing. This was all as it should be, and I went out in my new array, fearfully ashamed of having to pass the shopman, and suspicious after all that I was at a personal disadvantage, something like Joe's in his Sunday suit.

I went circuitously to Miss Havisham's by all the back ways, and rang at the bell constrainedly, on account of the stiff long fingers of my gloves. Sarah Pocket came to the gate, and positively reeled back when she saw me

so changed; her walnut-shell countenance likewise turned from brown to green and yellow.

"You?" said she. "You? Good gracious! What do you want?"

"I am going to London, Miss Pocket," said I, "and want to say good by to Miss Havisham."

I was not expected, for she left me locked in the yard, while she went to ask if I were to be admitted. After a very short delay, she returned and took me up, staring at me all the way.

Miss Havisham was taking exercise in the room with the long spread table, leaning on her crutch stick. The room was lighted as of yore, and at the sound of our entrance, she stopped and turned. She was then just abreast of the rotted bride-cake.

"Don't go, Sarah," she said. "Well, Pip?"

"I start for London, Miss Havisham, to-morrow," I was exceedingly careful what I said, "and I thought you would kindly not mind my taking leave of you."

"This is a gay figure, Pip," said she, making her crutch stick play round me, as if she, the fairy godmother who had changed me, were bestowing the finishing gift.

"I have come into such good fortune since I saw you last, Miss Havisham," I murmured. "And I am so grateful for it, Miss Havisham!"

"Ay, ay!" said she, looking at the discomfited and envious Sarah, with delight. "I have seen Mr. Jaggers. I have heard about it, Pip. So you go to-morrow?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

"And you are adopted by a rich person?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

"Not named?"

"No, Miss Havisham."

"And Mr. Jaggers is made your guardian?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

She quite gloated on these questions and answers, so keen was her enjoyment of Sarah Pocket's jealous dismay. "Well!" she went on; "you have a promising career before you. Be good—deserve it—and abide by Mr. Jaggers's instructions." She looked at me, and looked at Sarah, and Sarah's countenance wrung out of her watchful face a cruel smile. "Good

by, Pip!—you will always keep the name of Pip, you know."

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

"Good by, Pip!"

She stretched out her hand, and I went down on my knee and put it to my lips. I had not considered how I should take leave of her; it came naturally to me at the moment to do this. She looked at Sarah Pocket with triumph in her weird eyes, and so I left my fairy godmother, with both her hands on her crutch stick, standing in the midst of the dimly lighted room beside the rotten bride-cake that was hidden in cobwebs.

Sarah Pocket conducted me down, as if I were a ghost who must be seen out. She could not get over my appearance, and was in the last degree confounded. I said "Good by, Miss Pocket;" but she merely stared, and did not seem collected enough to know that I had spoken. Clear of the house, I made the best of my way back to Pumblechook's, took off my new clothes, made them into a bundle, and went back home in my older dress, carrying it —to speak the truth—much more at my ease too, though I had the bundle to carry.

And now, those six days which were to have run out so slowly, had run out fast and were gone, and to-morrow looked me in the face more steadily than I could look at it. As the six evenings had dwindled away, to five, to four, to three, to two, I had become more and more appreciative of the society of Joe and Biddy. On this last evening, I dressed my self out in my new clothes for their delight, and sat in my splendor until bedtime. We had a hot supper on the occasion, graced by the inevitable roast fowl, and we had some flip to finish with. We were all very low, and none the higher for pretending to be in spirits.

I was to leave our village at five in the morning, carrying my little hand-portmanteau, and I had told Joe that I wished to walk away all alone. I am afraid—sore afraid—that this purpose originated in my sense of the contrast there would be between me and Joe, if we went to the coach together. I had pretended with myself that there was nothing of this taint in the arrangement; but when I went up to my little room on this last night, I felt compelled to admit that it might be so, and had an impulse upon me to go down again and entreat Joe to walk with me in the morning. I did not.

All night there were coaches in my broken sleep, going to wrong places instead of to London, and having in the traces, now dogs, now cats, now

pigs, now men,—never horses. Fantastic failures of journeys occupied me until the day dawned and the birds were singing. Then, I got up and partly dressed, and sat at the window to take a last look out, and in taking it fell asleep.

Biddy was astir so early to get my breakfast, that, although I did not sleep at the window an hour, I smelt the smoke of the kitchen fire when I started up with a terrible idea that it must be late in the afternoon. But long after that, and long after I had heard the clinking of the teacups and was quite ready, I wanted the resolution to go down stairs. After all, I remained up there, repeatedly unlocking and unstrapping my small portmanteau and locking and strapping it up again, until Biddy called to me that I was late.

It was a hurried breakfast with no taste in it. I got up from the meal, saying with a sort of briskness, as if it had only just occurred to me, “Well! I suppose I must be off!” and then I kissed my sister who was laughing and nodding and shaking in her usual chair, and kissed Biddy, and threw my arms around Joe’s neck. Then I took up my little portmanteau and walked out. The last I saw of them was, when I presently heard a scuffle behind me, and looking back, saw Joe throwing an old shoe after me and Biddy throwing another old shoe. I stopped then, to wave my hat, and dear old Joe waved his strong right arm above his head, crying huskily “Hooroar!” and Biddy put her apron to her face.

I walked away at a good pace, thinking it was easier to go than I had supposed it would be, and reflecting that it would never have done to have had an old shoe thrown after the coach, in sight of all the High Street. I whistled and made nothing of going. But the village was very peaceful and quiet, and the light mists were solemnly rising, as if to show me the world, and I had been so innocent and little there, and all beyond was so unknown and great, that in a moment with a strong heave and sob I broke into tears. It was by the finger-post at the end of the village, and I laid my hand upon it, and said, “Good by, O my dear, dear friend!”

Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts. I was better after I had cried than before,—more sorry, more aware of my own ingratitude, more gentle. If I had cried before, I should have had Joe with me then.

So subdued I was by those tears, and by their breaking out again in the course of the quiet walk, that when I was on the coach, and it was clear of

the town, I deliberated with an aching heart whether I would not get down when we changed horses and walk back, and have another evening at home, and a better parting. We changed, and I had not made up my mind, and still reflected for my comfort that it would be quite practicable to get down and walk back, when we changed again. And while I was occupied with these deliberations, I would fancy an exact resemblance to Joe in some man coming along the road towards us, and my heart would beat high.— As if he could possibly be there!

We changed again, and yet again, and it was now too late and too far to go back, and I went on. And the mists had all solemnly risen now, and the world lay spread before me.

This is the end of the first stage of Pip’s expectations.

Chapter XX

THE JOURNEY FROM OUR town to the metropolis was a journey of about five hours. It was a little past midday when the four-horse stage-coach by which I was a passenger, got into the ravel of traffic frayed out about the Cross Keys, Wood Street, Cheapside, London.

We Britons had at that time particularly settled that it was treasonable to doubt our having and our being the best of everything: otherwise, while I was scared by the immensity of London, I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty.

Mr. Jaggers had duly sent me his address; it was, Little Britain, and he had written after it on his card, “just out of Smithfield, and close by the coach-office.” Nevertheless, a hackney-coachman, who seemed to have as many capes to his greasy great-coat as he was years old, packed me up in his coach and hemmed me in with a folding and jingling barrier of steps, as if he were going to take me fifty miles. His getting on his box, which I remember to have been decorated with an old weather-stained pea-green hammercloth moth-eaten into rags, was quite a work of time. It was a wonderful equipage, with six great coronets outside, and ragged things behind for I don’t know how many footmen to hold on by, and a harrow below them, to prevent amateur footmen from yielding to the temptation.

I had scarcely had time to enjoy the coach and to think how like a straw-yard it was, and yet how like a rag-shop, and to wonder why the horses’ nose-bags were kept inside, when I observed the coachman beginning to get down, as if we were going to stop presently. And stop we presently did, in a gloomy street, at certain offices with an open door, whereon was painted MR. JAGGERS.

“How much?” I asked the coachman.

The coachman answered, “A shilling—unless you wish to make it

more.”

I naturally said I had no wish to make it more.

“Then it must be a shilling,” observed the coachman. “I don’t want to get into trouble. I know him!” He darkly closed an eye at Mr. Jaggers’s name, and shook his head.

When he had got his shilling, and had in course of time completed the ascent to his box, and had got away (which appeared to relieve his mind), I went into the front office with my little portmanteau in my hand and asked, Was Mr. Jaggers at home?

“He is not,” returned the clerk. “He is in Court at present. Am I addressing Mr. Pip?”

I signified that he was addressing Mr. Pip.

“Mr. Jaggers left word, would you wait in his room. He couldn’t say how long he might be, having a case on. But it stands to reason, his time being valuable, that he won’t be longer than he can help.”

With those words, the clerk opened a door, and ushered me into an inner chamber at the back. Here, we found a gentleman with one eye, in a velveteen suit and knee-breeches, who wiped his nose with his sleeve on being interrupted in the perusal of the newspaper.

“Go and wait outside, Mike,” said the clerk.

I began to say that I hoped I was not interrupting, when the clerk shoved this gentleman out with as little ceremony as I ever saw used, and tossing his fur cap out after him, left me alone.

Mr. Jaggers’s room was lighted by a skylight only, and was a most dismal place; the skylight, eccentrically pitched like a broken head, and the distorted adjoining houses looking as if they had twisted themselves to peep down at me through it. There were not so many papers about, as I should have expected to see; and there were some odd objects about, that I should not have expected to see,—such as an old rusty pistol, a sword in a scabbard, several strange-looking boxes and packages, and two dreadful casts on a shelf, of faces peculiarly swollen, and twitchy about the nose. Mr. Jaggers’s own high-backed chair was of deadly black horsehair, with rows of brass nails round it, like a coffin; and I fancied I could see how he leaned back in it, and bit his forefinger at the clients. The room was but small, and the clients seemed to have had a habit of backing up against the wall; the wall, especially opposite to Mr. Jaggers’s chair, being greasy with

shoulders. I recalled, too, that the one-eyed gentleman had shuffled forth against the wall when I was the innocent cause of his being turned out.

I sat down in the cliental chair placed over against Mr. Jaggers's chair, and became fascinated by the dismal atmosphere of the place. I called to mind that the clerk had the same air of knowing something to everybody else's disadvantage, as his master had. I wondered how many other clerks there were up stairs, and whether they all claimed to have the same detrimental mastery of their fellow-creatures. I wondered what was the history of all the odd litter about the room, and how it came there. I wondered whether the two swollen faces were of Mr. Jaggers's family, and, if he were so unfortunate as to have had a pair of such ill-looking relations, why he stuck them on that dusty perch for the blacks and flies to settle on, instead of giving them a place at home. Of course I had no experience of a London summer day, and my spirits may have been oppressed by the hot exhausted air, and by the dust and grit that lay thick on everything. But I sat wondering and waiting in Mr. Jaggers's close room, until I really could not bear the two casts on the shelf above Mr. Jaggers's chair, and got up and went out.

When I told the clerk that I would take a turn in the air while I waited, he advised me to go round the corner and I should come into Smithfield. So I came into Smithfield; and the shameful place, being all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me. So, I rubbed it off with all possible speed by turning into a street where I saw the great black dome of Saint Paul's bulging at me from behind a grim stone building which a bystander said was Newgate Prison. Following the wall of the jail, I found the roadway covered with straw to deaden the noise of passing vehicles; and from this, and from the quantity of people standing about smelling strongly of spirits and beer, I inferred that the trials were on.

While I looked about me here, an exceedingly dirty and partially drunk minister of justice asked me if I would like to step in and hear a trial or so: informing me that he could give me a front place for half a crown, whence I should command a full view of the Lord Chief Justice in his wig and robes, —mentioning that awful personage like waxwork, and presently offering him at the reduced price of eighteen-pence. As I declined the proposal on the plea of an appointment, he was so good as to take me into a yard and show me where the gallows was kept, and also where people were publicly

whipped, and then he showed me the Debtors' Door, out of which culprits came to be hanged; heightening the interest of that dreadful portal by giving me to understand that "four on 'em" would come out at that door the day after to-morrow at eight in the morning, to be killed in a row. This was horrible, and gave me a sickening idea of London; the more so as the Lord Chief Justice's proprietor wore (from his hat down to his boots and up again to his pocket-handkerchief inclusive) mildewed clothes which had evidently not belonged to him originally, and which I took it into my head he had bought cheap of the executioner. Under these circumstances I thought myself well rid of him for a shilling.

I dropped into the office to ask if Mr. Jaggers had come in yet, and I found he had not, and I strolled out again. This time, I made the tour of Little Britain, and turned into Bartholomew Close; and now I became aware that other people were waiting about for Mr. Jaggers, as well as I. There were two men of secret appearance lounging in Bartholomew Close, and thoughtfully fitting their feet into the cracks of the pavement as they talked together, one of whom said to the other when they first passed me, that "Jaggers would do it if it was to be done." There was a knot of three men and two women standing at a corner, and one of the women was crying on her dirty shawl, and the other comforted her by saying, as she pulled her own shawl over her shoulders, "Jaggers is for him, 'Melia, and what more could you have?" There was a red-eyed little Jew who came into the Close while I was loitering there, in company with a second little Jew whom he sent upon an errand; and while the messenger was gone, I remarked this Jew, who was of a highly excitable temperament, performing a jig of anxiety under a lamp-post and accompanying himself, in a kind of frenzy, with the words, "O Jaggerth, Jaggerth, Jaggerth! all otherth ith Cag-Maggerth, give me Jaggerth!" These testimonies to the popularity of my guardian made a deep impression on me, and I admired and wondered more than ever.

At length, as I was looking out at the iron gate of Bartholomew Close into Little Britain, I saw Mr. Jaggers coming across the road towards me. All the others who were waiting saw him at the same time, and there was quite a rush at him. Mr. Jaggers, putting a hand on my shoulder and walking me on at his side without saying anything to me, addressed himself to his followers.

First, he took the two secret men.

“Now, I have nothing to say to you,” said Mr. Jaggers, throwing his finger at them. “I want to know no more than I know. As to the result, it’s a toss-up. I told you from the first it was a toss-up. Have you paid Wemmick?”

“We made the money up this morning, sir,” said one of the men, submissively, while the other perused Mr. Jaggers’s face.

“I don’t ask you when you made it up, or where, or whether you made it up at all. Has Wemmick got it?”

“Yes, sir,” said both the men together.

“Very well; then you may go. Now, I won’t have it!” said Mr. Jaggers, waving his hand at them to put them behind him. “If you say a word to me, I’ll throw up the case.”

“We thought, Mr. Jaggers—” one of the men began, pulling off his hat.

“That’s what I told you not to do,” said Mr. Jaggers. “You thought! I think for you; that’s enough for you. If I want you, I know where to find you; I don’t want you to find me. Now I won’t have it. I won’t hear a word.”

The two men looked at one another as Mr. Jaggers waved them behind again, and humbly fell back and were heard no more.

“And now you!” said Mr. Jaggers, suddenly stopping, and turning on the two women with the shawls, from whom the three men had meekly separated,—“Oh! Amelia, is it?”

“Yes, Mr. Jaggers.”

“And do you remember,” retorted Mr. Jaggers, “that but for me you wouldn’t be here and couldn’t be here?”

“O yes, sir!” exclaimed both women together. “Lord bless you, sir, well we knows that!”

“Then why,” said Mr. Jaggers, “do you come here?”

“My Bill, sir!” the crying woman pleaded.

“Now, I tell you what!” said Mr. Jaggers. “Once for all. If you don’t know that your Bill’s in good hands, I know it. And if you come here bothering about your Bill, I’ll make an example of both your Bill and you, and let him slip through my fingers. Have you paid Wemmick?”

“O yes, sir! Every farden.”

“Very well. Then you have done all you have got to do. Say another

word—one single word—and Wemmick shall give you your money back."

This terrible threat caused the two women to fall off immediately. No one remained now but the excitable Jew, who had already raised the skirts of Mr. Jaggers's coat to his lips several times.

"I don't know this man!" said Mr. Jaggers, in the same devastating strain: "What does this fellow want?"

"Ma thear Mithter Jaggerth. Hown brother to Habraham Latharuth?"

"Who's he?" said Mr. Jaggers. "Let go of my coat."

The suitor, kissing the hem of the garment again before relinquishing it, replied, "Habraham Latharuth, on thuthpithion of plate."

"You're too late," said Mr. Jaggers. "I am over the way."

"Holy father, Mithter Jaggerth!" cried my excitable acquaintance, turning white, "don't thay you're again Habraham Latharuth!"

"I am," said Mr. Jaggers, "and there's an end of it. Get out of the way."

"Mithter Jaggerth! Half a moment! My hown cuthen'th gone to Mithter Wemmick at thith prethent minute, to hoffer him hany termth. Mithter Jaggerth! Half a quarter of a moment! If you'd have the condethenthun to be bought off from the t'other thide—at hany thuperior prithe!—money no object!—Mithter Jaggerth—Mithter—!"

My guardian threw his supplicant off with supreme indifference, and left him dancing on the pavement as if it were red hot. Without further interruption, we reached the front office, where we found the clerk and the man in velveteen with the fur cap.

"Here's Mike," said the clerk, getting down from his stool, and approaching Mr. Jaggers confidentially.

"Oh!" said Mr. Jaggers, turning to the man, who was pulling a lock of hair in the middle of his forehead, like the Bull in Cock Robin pulling at the bell-rope; "your man comes on this afternoon. Well?"

"Well, Mas'r Jaggers," returned Mike, in the voice of a sufferer from a constitutional cold; "arter a deal o' trouble, I've found one, sir, as might do."

"What is he prepared to swear?"

"Well, Mas'r Jaggers," said Mike, wiping his nose on his fur cap this time; "in a general way, anythink."

Mr. Jaggers suddenly became most irate. "Now, I warned you before," said he, throwing his forefinger at the terrified client, "that if you ever

presumed to talk in that way here, I'd make an example of you. You infernal scoundrel, how dare you tell *me* that?"

The client looked scared, but bewildered too, as if he were unconscious what he had done.

"Spooney!" said the clerk, in a low voice, giving him a stir with his elbow. "Soft Head! Need you say it face to face?"

"Now, I ask you, you blundering booby," said my guardian, very sternly, "once more and for the last time, what the man you have brought here is prepared to swear?"

Mike looked hard at my guardian, as if he were trying to learn a lesson from his face, and slowly replied, "Ayther to character, or to having been in his company and never left him all the night in question."

"Now, be careful. In what station of life is this man?"

Mike looked at his cap, and looked at the floor, and looked at the ceiling, and looked at the clerk, and even looked at me, before beginning to reply in a nervous manner, "We've dressed him up like—" when my guardian blustered out,—

"What? You *will*, will you?"

("Spooney!" added the clerk again, with another stir.)

After some helpless casting about, Mike brightened and began again:—

"He is dressed like a 'spectable pieman. A sort of a pastry-cook."

"Is he here?" asked my guardian.

"I left him," said Mike, "a setting on some doorsteps round the corner."

"Take him past that window, and let me see him."

The window indicated was the office window. We all three went to it, behind the wire blind, and presently saw the client go by in an accidental manner, with a murderous-looking tall individual, in a short suit of white linen and a paper cap. This guileless confectioner was not by any means sober, and had a black eye in the green stage of recovery, which was painted over.

"Tell him to take his witness away directly," said my guardian to the clerk, in extreme disgust, "and ask him what he means by bringing such a fellow as that."

My guardian then took me into his own room, and while he lunched, standing, from a sandwich-box and a pocket-flask of sherry (he seemed to bully his very sandwich as he ate it), informed me what arrangements he

had made for me. I was to go to “Barnard’s Inn,” to young Mr. Pocket’s rooms, where a bed had been sent in for my accommodation; I was to remain with young Mr. Pocket until Monday; on Monday I was to go with him to his father’s house on a visit, that I might try how I liked it. Also, I was told what my allowance was to be,—it was a very liberal one,—and had handed to me from one of my guardian’s drawers, the cards of certain tradesmen with whom I was to deal for all kinds of clothes, and such other things as I could in reason want. “You will find your credit good, Mr. Pip,” said my guardian, whose flask of sherry smelt like a whole caskful, as he hastily refreshed himself, “but I shall by this means be able to check your bills, and to pull you up if I find you outrunning the constable. Of course you’ll go wrong somehow, but that’s no fault of mine.”

After I had pondered a little over this encouraging sentiment, I asked Mr. Jaggers if I could send for a coach? He said it was not worth while, I was so near my destination; Wemmick should walk round with me, if I pleased.

I then found that Wemmick was the clerk in the next room. Another clerk was rung down from up stairs to take his place while he was out, and I accompanied him into the street, after shaking hands with my guardian. We found a new set of people lingering outside, but Wemmick made a way among them by saying coolly yet decisively, “I tell you it’s no use; he won’t have a word to say to one of you;” and we soon got clear of them, and went on side by side.

Chapter XXI

CASTING MY EYES ON Mr. Wemmick as we went along, to see what he was like in the light of day, I found him to be a dry man, rather short in stature, with a square wooden face, whose expression seemed to have been imperfectly chipped out with a dull-edged chisel. There were some marks in it that might have been dimples, if the material had been softer and the instrument finer, but which, as it was, were only dints. The chisel had made three or four of these attempts at embellishment over his nose, but had given them up without an effort to smooth them off. I judged him to be a bachelor from the frayed condition of his linen, and he appeared to have sustained a good many bereavements; for he wore at least four mourning rings, besides a brooch representing a lady and a weeping willow at a tomb with an urn on it. I noticed, too, that several rings and seals hung at his watch-chain, as if he were quite laden with remembrances of departed friends. He had glittering eyes,—small, keen, and black,—and thin wide mottled lips. He had had them, to the best of my belief, from forty to fifty years.

"So you were never in London before?" said Mr. Wemmick to me.

"No," said I.

"I was new here once," said Mr. Wemmick. "Rum to think of now!"

"You are well acquainted with it now?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Wemmick. "I know the moves of it."

"Is it a very wicked place?" I asked, more for the sake of saying something than for information.

"You may get cheated, robbed, and murdered in London. But there are plenty of people anywhere, who'll do that for you."

"If there is bad blood between you and them," said I, to soften it off a little.

“O! I don’t know about bad blood,” returned Mr. Wemmick; “there’s not much bad blood about. They’ll do it, if there’s anything to be got by it.”

“That makes it worse.”

“You think so?” returned Mr. Wemmick. “Much about the same, I should say.”

He wore his hat on the back of his head, and looked straight before him: walking in a self-contained way as if there were nothing in the streets to claim his attention. His mouth was such a post-office of a mouth that he had a mechanical appearance of smiling. We had got to the top of Holborn Hill before I knew that it was merely a mechanical appearance, and that he was not smiling at all.

“Do you know where Mr. Matthew Pocket lives?” I asked Mr. Wemmick.

“Yes,” said he, nodding in the direction. “At Hammersmith, west of London.”

“Is that far?”

“Well! Say five miles.”

“Do you know him?”

“Why, you’re a regular cross-examiner!” said Mr. Wemmick, looking at me with an approving air. “Yes, I know him. I know him!”

There was an air of toleration or depreciation about his utterance of these words that rather depressed me; and I was still looking sideways at his block of a face in search of any encouraging note to the text, when he said here we were at Barnard’s Inn. My depression was not alleviated by the announcement, for, I had supposed that establishment to be an hotel kept by Mr. Barnard, to which the Blue Boar in our town was a mere public-house. Whereas I now found Barnard to be a disembodied spirit, or a fiction, and his inn the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for Tom-cats.

We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the most dismal trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses (in number half a dozen or so), that I had ever seen. I thought the windows of the sets of chambers into which those houses were divided were in every stage of dilapidated blind and curtain, crippled flower-pot,

cracked glass, dusty decay, and miserable makeshift; while To Let, To Let, To Let, glared at me from empty rooms, as if no new wretches ever came there, and the vengeance of the soul of Barnard were being slowly appeased by the gradual suicide of the present occupants and their unholy interment under the gravel. A frowzy mourning of soot and smoke attired this forlorn creation of Barnard, and it had strewn ashes on its head, and was undergoing penance and humiliation as a mere dust-hole. Thus far my sense of sight; while dry rot and wet rot and all the silent rots that rot in neglected roof and cellar,—rot of rat and mouse and bug and coaching-stables near at hand besides—addressed themselves faintly to my sense of smell, and moaned, “Try Barnard’s Mixture.”

So imperfect was this realization of the first of my great expectations, that I looked in dismay at Mr. Wemmick. “Ah!” said he, mistaking me; “the retirement reminds you of the country. So it does me.”

He led me into a corner and conducted me up a flight of stairs,—which appeared to me to be slowly collapsing into sawdust, so that one of those days the upper lodgers would look out at their doors and find themselves without the means of coming down,—to a set of chambers on the top floor. MR. POCKET, JUN., was painted on the door, and there was a label on the letter-box, “Return shortly.”

“He hardly thought you’d come so soon,” Mr. Wemmick explained. “You don’t want me any more?”

“No, thank you,” said I.

“As I keep the cash,” Mr. Wemmick observed, “we shall most likely meet pretty often. Good day.”

“Good day.”

I put out my hand, and Mr. Wemmick at first looked at it as if he thought I wanted something. Then he looked at me, and said, correcting himself,—

“To be sure! Yes. You’re in the habit of shaking hands?”

I was rather confused, thinking it must be out of the London fashion, but said yes.

“I have got so out of it!” said Mr. Wemmick,—“except at last. Very glad, I’m sure, to make your acquaintance. Good day!”

When we had shaken hands and he was gone, I opened the staircase window and had nearly beheaded myself, for, the lines had rotted away, and it came down like the guillotine. Happily it was so quick that I had not put

my head out. After this escape, I was content to take a foggy view of the Inn through the window's encrusting dirt, and to stand dolefully looking out, saying to myself that London was decidedly overrated.

Mr. Pocket, Junior's, idea of Shortly was not mine, for I had nearly maddened myself with looking out for half an hour, and had written my name with my finger several times in the dirt of every pane in the window, before I heard footsteps on the stairs. Gradually there arose before me the hat, head, neckcloth, waistcoat, trousers, boots, of a member of society of about my own standing. He had a paper-bag under each arm and a pottle of strawberries in one hand, and was out of breath.

"Mr. Pip?" said he.

"Mr. Pocket?" said I.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I am extremely sorry; but I knew there was a coach from your part of the country at midday, and I thought you would come by that one. The fact is, I have been out on your account,—not that that is any excuse,—for I thought, coming from the country, you might like a little fruit after dinner, and I went to Covent Garden Market to get it good."

For a reason that I had, I felt as if my eyes would start out of my head. I acknowledged his attention incoherently, and began to think this was a dream.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Pocket, Junior. "This door sticks so!"

As he was fast making jam of his fruit by wrestling with the door while the paper-bags were under his arms, I begged him to allow me to hold them. He relinquished them with an agreeable smile, and combated with the door as if it were a wild beast. It yielded so suddenly at last, that he staggered back upon me, and I staggered back upon the opposite door, and we both laughed. But still I felt as if my eyes must start out of my head, and as if this must be a dream.

"Pray come in," said Mr. Pocket, Junior. "Allow me to lead the way. I am rather bare here, but I hope you'll be able to make out tolerably well till Monday. My father thought you would get on more agreeably through to-morrow with me than with him, and might like to take a walk about London. I am sure I shall be very happy to show London to you. As to our table, you won't find that bad, I hope, for it will be supplied from our coffee-house here, and (it is only right I should add) at your expense, such

being Mr. Jaggers's directions. As to our lodging, it's not by any means splendid, because I have my own bread to earn, and my father hasn't anything to give me, and I shouldn't be willing to take it, if he had. This is our sitting-room,—just such chairs and tables and carpet and so forth, you see, as they could spare from home. You mustn't give me credit for the tablecloth and spoons and castors, because they come for you from the coffee-house. This is my little bedroom; rather musty, but Barnard's is musty. This is your bedroom; the furniture's hired for the occasion, but I trust it will answer the purpose; if you should want anything, I'll go and fetch it. The chambers are retired, and we shall be alone together, but we shan't fight, I dare say. But dear me, I beg your pardon, you're holding the fruit all this time. Pray let me take these bags from you. I am quite ashamed."

As I stood opposite to Mr. Pocket, Junior, delivering him the bags, One, Two, I saw the starting appearance come into his own eyes that I knew to be in mine, and he said, falling back,—

"Lord bless me, you're the prowling boy!"

"And you," said I, "are the pale young gentleman!"

Chapter XXII

THE PALE YOUNG GENTLEMAN and I stood contemplating one another in Barnard's Inn, until we both burst out laughing. "The idea of its being you!" said he. "The idea of its being you!" said I. And then we contemplated one another afresh, and laughed again. "Well!" said the pale young gentleman, reaching out his hand good-humoredly, "it's all over now, I hope, and it will be magnanimous in you if you'll forgive me for having knocked you about so."

I derived from this speech that Mr. Herbert Pocket (for Herbert was the pale young gentleman's name) still rather confounded his intention with his execution. But I made a modest reply, and we shook hands warmly.

"You hadn't come into your good fortune at that time?" said Herbert Pocket.

"No," said I.

"No," he acquiesced: "I heard it had happened very lately. I was rather on the lookout for good fortune then."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Miss Havisham had sent for me, to see if she could take a fancy to me. But she couldn't,—at all events, she didn't."

I thought it polite to remark that I was surprised to hear that.

"Bad taste," said Herbert, laughing, "but a fact. Yes, she had sent for me on a trial visit, and if I had come out of it successfully, I suppose I should have been provided for; perhaps I should have been what-you-may-called it to Estella."

"What's that?" I asked, with sudden gravity.

He was arranging his fruit in plates while we talked, which divided his attention, and was the cause of his having made this lapse of a word. "Affianced," he explained, still busy with the fruit. "Betrothed. Engaged.

What’s-his-named. Any word of that sort.”

“How did you bear your disappointment?” I asked.

“Pooh!” said he, “I didn’t care much for it. She’s a Tartar.”

“Miss Havisham?”

“I don’t say no to that, but I meant Estella. That girl’s hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree, and has been brought up by Miss Havisham to wreak revenge on all the male sex.”

“What relation is she to Miss Havisham?”

“None,” said he. “Only adopted.”

“Why should she wreak revenge on all the male sex? What revenge?”

“Lord, Mr. Pip!” said he. “Don’t you know?”

“No,” said I.

“Dear me! It’s quite a story, and shall be saved till dinner-time. And now let me take the liberty of asking you a question. How did you come there, that day?”

I told him, and he was attentive until I had finished, and then burst out laughing again, and asked me if I was sore afterwards? I didn’t ask him if he was, for my conviction on that point was perfectly established.

“Mr. Jaggers is your guardian, I understand?” he went on.

“Yes.”

“You know he is Miss Havisham’s man of business and solicitor, and has her confidence when nobody else has?”

This was bringing me (I felt) towards dangerous ground. I answered with a constraint I made no attempt to disguise, that I had seen Mr. Jaggers in Miss Havisham’s house on the very day of our combat, but never at any other time, and that I believed he had no recollection of having ever seen me there.

“He was so obliging as to suggest my father for your tutor, and he called on my father to propose it. Of course he knew about my father from his connection with Miss Havisham. My father is Miss Havisham’s cousin; not that that implies familiar intercourse between them, for he is a bad courtier and will not propitiate her.”

Herbert Pocket had a frank and easy way with him that was very taking. I had never seen any one then, and I have never seen any one since, who more strongly expressed to me, in every look and tone, a natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean. There was something wonderfully hopeful

about his general air, and something that at the same time whispered to me he would never be very successful or rich. I don't know how this was. I became imbued with the notion on that first occasion before we sat down to dinner, but I cannot define by what means.

He was still a pale young gentleman, and had a certain conquered languor about him in the midst of his spirits and briskness, that did not seem indicative of natural strength. He had not a handsome face, but it was better than handsome: being extremely amiable and cheerful. His figure was a little ungainly, as in the days when my knuckles had taken such liberties with it, but it looked as if it would always be light and young. Whether Mr. Trabb's local work would have sat more gracefully on him than on me, may be a question; but I am conscious that he carried off his rather old clothes much better than I carried off my new suit.

As he was so communicative, I felt that reserve on my part would be a bad return unsuited to our years. I therefore told him my small story, and laid stress on my being forbidden to inquire who my benefactor was. I further mentioned that as I had been brought up a blacksmith in a country place, and knew very little of the ways of politeness, I would take it as a great kindness in him if he would give me a hint whenever he saw me at a loss or going wrong.

"With pleasure," said he, "though I venture to prophesy that you'll want very few hints. I dare say we shall be often together, and I should like to banish any needless restraint between us. Will you do me the favour to begin at once to call me by my Christian name, Herbert?"

I thanked him and said I would. I informed him in exchange that my Christian name was Philip.

"I don't take to Philip," said he, smiling, "for it sounds like a moral boy out of the spelling-book, who was so lazy that he fell into a pond, or so fat that he couldn't see out of his eyes, or so avaricious that he locked up his cake till the mice ate it, or so determined to go a bird's-nesting that he got himself eaten by bears who lived handy in the neighborhood. I tell you what I should like. We are so harmonious, and you have been a blacksmith,—would you mind it?"

"I shouldn't mind anything that you propose," I answered, "but I don't understand you."

"Would you mind Handel for a familiar name? There's a charming piece

of music by Handel, called the Harmonious Blacksmith."

"I should like it very much."

"Then, my dear Handel," said he, turning round as the door opened, "here is the dinner, and I must beg of you to take the top of the table, because the dinner is of your providing."

This I would not hear of, so he took the top, and I faced him. It was a nice little dinner,—seemed to me then a very Lord Mayor's Feast,—and it acquired additional relish from being eaten under those independent circumstances, with no old people by, and with London all around us. This again was heightened by a certain gypsy character that set the banquet off; for while the table was, as Mr. Pumblechook might have said, the lap of luxury,—being entirely furnished forth from the coffee-house,—the circumjacent region of sitting-room was of a comparatively pastureless and shifty character; imposing on the waiter the wandering habits of putting the covers on the floor (where he fell over them), the melted butter in the arm-chair, the bread on the bookshelves, the cheese in the coal-scuttle, and the boiled fowl into my bed in the next room,—where I found much of its parsley and butter in a state of congelation when I retired for the night. All this made the feast delightful, and when the waiter was not there to watch me, my pleasure was without alloy.

We had made some progress in the dinner, when I reminded Herbert of his promise to tell me about Miss Havisham.

"True," he replied. "I'll redeem it at once. Let me introduce the topic, Handel, by mentioning that in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth,—for fear of accidents,—and that while the fork is reserved for that use, it is not put further in than necessary. It is scarcely worth mentioning, only it's as well to do as other people do. Also, the spoon is not generally used over-hand, but under. This has two advantages. You get at your mouth better (which after all is the object), and you save a good deal of the attitude of opening oysters, on the part of the right elbow."

He offered these friendly suggestions in such a lively way, that we both laughed and I scarcely blushed.

"Now," he pursued, "concerning Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham, you must know, was a spoilt child. Her mother died when she was a baby, and her father denied her nothing. Her father was a country gentleman down in your part of the world, and was a brewer. I don't know why it should be a

crack thing to be a brewer; but it is indisputable that while you cannot possibly be genteel and bake, you may be as genteel as never was and brew. You see it every day."

"Yet a gentleman may not keep a public-house; may he?" said I.

"Not on any account," returned Herbert; "but a public-house may keep a gentleman. Well! Mr. Havisham was very rich and very proud. So was his daughter."

"Miss Havisham was an only child?" I hazarded.

"Stop a moment, I am coming to that. No, she was not an only child; she had a half-brother. Her father privately married again—his cook, I rather think."

"I thought he was proud," said I.

"My good Handel, so he was. He married his second wife privately, because he was proud, and in course of time she died. When she was dead, I apprehend he first told his daughter what he had done, and then the son became a part of the family, residing in the house you are acquainted with. As the son grew a young man, he turned out riotous, extravagant, undutiful, —altogether bad. At last his father disinherited him; but he softened when he was dying, and left him well off, though not nearly so well off as Miss Havisham.— Take another glass of wine, and excuse my mentioning that society as a body does not expect one to be so strictly conscientious in emptying one's glass, as to turn it bottom upwards with the rim on one's nose."

I had been doing this, in an excess of attention to his recital. I thanked him, and apologized. He said, "Not at all," and resumed.

"Miss Havisham was now an heiress, and you may suppose was looked after as a great match. Her half-brother had now ample means again, but what with debts and what with new madness wasted them most fearfully again. There were stronger differences between him and her than there had been between him and his father, and it is suspected that he cherished a deep and mortal grudge against her as having influenced the father's anger. Now, I come to the cruel part of the story,—merely breaking off, my dear Handel, to remark that a dinner-napkin will not go into a tumbler."

Why I was trying to pack mine into my tumbler, I am wholly unable to say. I only know that I found myself, with a perseverance worthy of a much better cause, making the most strenuous exertions to compress it within

those limits. Again I thanked him and apologized, and again he said in the cheerfullest manner, “Not at all, I am sure!” and resumed.

“There appeared upon the scene—say at the races, or the public balls, or anywhere else you like—a certain man, who made love to Miss Havisham. I never saw him (for this happened five-and-twenty years ago, before you and I were, Handel), but I have heard my father mention that he was a showy man, and the kind of man for the purpose. But that he was not to be, without ignorance or prejudice, mistaken for a gentleman, my father most strongly asseverates; because it is a principle of his that no man who was not a true gentleman at heart ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in manner. He says, no varnish can hide the grain of the wood; and that the more varnish you put on, the more the grain will express itself. Well! This man pursued Miss Havisham closely, and professed to be devoted to her. I believe she had not shown much susceptibility up to that time; but all the susceptibility she possessed certainly came out then, and she passionately loved him. There is no doubt that she perfectly idolized him. He practised on her affection in that systematic way, that he got great sums of money from her, and he induced her to buy her brother out of a share in the brewery (which had been weakly left him by his father) at an immense price, on the plea that when he was her husband he must hold and manage it all. Your guardian was not at that time in Miss Havisham’s counsels, and she was too haughty and too much in love to be advised by any one. Her relations were poor and scheming, with the exception of my father; he was poor enough, but not time-serving or jealous. The only independent one among them, he warned her that she was doing too much for this man, and was placing herself too unreservedly in his power. She took the first opportunity of angrily ordering my father out of the house, in his presence, and my father has never seen her since.”

I thought of her having said, “Matthew will come and see me at last when I am laid dead upon that table;” and I asked Herbert whether his father was so inveterate against her?

“It’s not that,” said he, “but she charged him, in the presence of her intended husband, with being disappointed in the hope of fawning upon her for his own advancement, and, if he were to go to her now, it would look true—even to him—and even to her. To return to the man and make an end of him. The marriage day was fixed, the wedding dresses were bought, the

wedding tour was planned out, the wedding guests were invited. The day came, but not the bridegroom. He wrote her a letter—”

“Which she received,” I struck in, “when she was dressing for her marriage? At twenty minutes to nine?”

“At the hour and minute,” said Herbert, nodding, “at which she afterwards stopped all the clocks. What was in it, further than that it most heartlessly broke the marriage off, I can’t tell you, because I don’t know. When she recovered from a bad illness that she had, she laid the whole place waste, as you have seen it, and she has never since looked upon the light of day.”

“Is that all the story?” I asked, after considering it.

“All I know of it; and indeed I only know so much, through piecing it out for myself; for my father always avoids it, and, even when Miss Havisham invited me to go there, told me no more of it than it was absolutely requisite I should understand. But I have forgotten one thing. It has been supposed that the man to whom she gave her misplaced confidence acted throughout in concert with her half-brother; that it was a conspiracy between them; and that they shared the profits.”

“I wonder he didn’t marry her and get all the property,” said I.

“He may have been married already, and her cruel mortification may have been a part of her half-brother’s scheme,” said Herbert. “Mind! I don’t know that.”

“What became of the two men?” I asked, after again considering the subject.

“They fell into deeper shame and degradation—if there can be deeper—and ruin.”

“Are they alive now?”

“I don’t know.”

“You said just now that Estella was not related to Miss Havisham, but adopted. When adopted?”

Herbert shrugged his shoulders. “There has always been an Estella, since I have heard of a Miss Havisham. I know no more. And now, Handel,” said he, finally throwing off the story as it were, “there is a perfectly open understanding between us. All that I know about Miss Havisham, you know.”

“And all that I know,” I retorted, “you know.”

“I fully believe it. So there can be no competition or perplexity between you and me. And as to the condition on which you hold your advancement in life,—namely, that you are not to inquire or discuss to whom you owe it, —you may be very sure that it will never be encroached upon, or even approached, by me, or by any one belonging to me.”

In truth, he said this with so much delicacy, that I felt the subject done with, even though I should be under his father’s roof for years and years to come. Yet he said it with so much meaning, too, that I felt he as perfectly understood Miss Havisham to be my benefactress, as I understood the fact myself.

It had not occurred to me before, that he had led up to the theme for the purpose of clearing it out of our way; but we were so much the lighter and easier for having broached it, that I now perceived this to be the case. We were very gay and sociable, and I asked him, in the course of conversation, what he was? He replied, “A capitalist,—an Insurer of Ships.” I suppose he saw me glancing about the room in search of some tokens of Shipping, or capital, for he added, “In the City.”

I had grand ideas of the wealth and importance of Insurers of Ships in the City, and I began to think with awe of having laid a young Insurer on his back, blackened his enterprising eye, and cut his responsible head open. But again there came upon me, for my relief, that odd impression that Herbert Pocket would never be very successful or rich.

“I shall not rest satisfied with merely employing my capital in insuring ships. I shall buy up some good Life Assurance shares, and cut into the Direction. I shall also do a little in the mining way. None of these things will interfere with my chartering a few thousand tons on my own account. I think I shall trade,” said he, leaning back in his chair, “to the East Indies, for silks, shawls, spices, dyes, drugs, and precious woods. It’s an interesting trade.”

“And the profits are large?” said I.

“Tremendous!” said he.

I wavered again, and began to think here were greater expectations than my own.

“I think I shall trade, also,” said he, putting his thumbs in his waist-coat pockets, “to the West Indies, for sugar, tobacco, and rum. Also to Ceylon, specially for elephants’ tusks.”

“You will want a good many ships,” said I.

“A perfect fleet,” said he.

Quite overpowered by the magnificence of these transactions, I asked him where the ships he insured mostly traded to at present?

“I haven’t begun insuring yet,” he replied. “I am looking about me.”

Somehow, that pursuit seemed more in keeping with Barnard’s Inn. I said (in a tone of conviction), “Ah-h!”

“Yes. I am in a counting-house, and looking about me.”

“Is a counting-house profitable?” I asked.

“To—do you mean to the young fellow who’s in it?” he asked, in reply.

“Yes; to you.”

“Why, n-no; not to me.” He said this with the air of one carefully reckoning up and striking a balance. “Not directly profitable. That is, it doesn’t pay me anything, and I have to—keep myself.”

This certainly had not a profitable appearance, and I shook my head as if I would imply that it would be difficult to lay by much accumulative capital from such a source of income.

“But the thing is,” said Herbert Pocket, “that you look about you. That’s the grand thing. You are in a counting-house, you know, and you look about you.”

It struck me as a singular implication that you couldn’t be out of a counting-house, you know, and look about you; but I silently deferred to his experience.

“Then the time comes,” said Herbert, “when you see your opening. And you go in, and you swoop upon it and you make your capital, and then there you are! When you have once made your capital, you have nothing to do but employ it.”

This was very like his way of conducting that encounter in the garden; very like. His manner of bearing his poverty, too, exactly corresponded to his manner of bearing that defeat. It seemed to me that he took all blows and buffets now with just the same air as he had taken mine then. It was evident that he had nothing around him but the simplest necessaries, for everything that I remarked upon turned out to have been sent in on my account from the coffee-house or somewhere else.

Yet, having already made his fortune in his own mind, he was so unassuming with it that I felt quite grateful to him for not being puffed up.

It was a pleasant addition to his naturally pleasant ways, and we got on famously. In the evening we went out for a walk in the streets, and went half-price to the Theatre; and next day we went to church at Westminster Abbey, and in the afternoon we walked in the Parks; and I wondered who shod all the horses there, and wished Joe did.

On a moderate computation, it was many months, that Sunday, since I had left Joe and Biddy. The space interposed between myself and them partook of that expansion, and our marshes were any distance off. That I could have been at our old church in my old church-going clothes, on the very last Sunday that ever was, seemed a combination of impossibilities, geographical and social, solar and lunar. Yet in the London streets so crowded with people and so brilliantly lighted in the dusk of evening, there were depressing hints of reproaches for that I had put the poor old kitchen at home so far away; and in the dead of night, the footsteps of some incapable impostor of a porter mooning about Barnard's Inn, under pretence of watching it, fell hollow on my heart.

On the Monday morning at a quarter before nine, Herbert went to the counting-house to report himself,—to look about him, too, I suppose,—and I bore him company. He was to come away in an hour or two to attend me to Hammersmith, and I was to wait about for him. It appeared to me that the eggs from which young Insurers were hatched were incubated in dust and heat, like the eggs of ostriches, judging from the places to which those incipient giants repaired on a Monday morning. Nor did the counting-house where Herbert assisted, show in my eyes as at all a good Observatory; being a back second floor up a yard, of a grimy presence in all particulars, and with a look into another back second floor, rather than a look out.

I waited about until it was noon, and I went upon 'Change, and I saw fluey men sitting there under the bills about shipping, whom I took to be great merchants, though I couldn't understand why they should all be out of spirits. When Herbert came, we went and had lunch at a celebrated house which I then quite venerated, but now believe to have been the most abject superstition in Europe, and where I could not help noticing, even then, that there was much more gravy on the tablecloths and knives and waiters' clothes, than in the steaks. This collation disposed of at a moderate price (considering the grease, which was not charged for), we went back to Barnard's Inn and got my little portmanteau, and then took coach for

Hammersmith. We arrived there at two or three o'clock in the afternoon, and had very little way to walk to Mr. Pocket's house. Lifting the latch of a gate, we passed direct into a little garden overlooking the river, where Mr. Pocket's children were playing about. And unless I deceive myself on a point where my interests or prepossessions are certainly not concerned, I saw that Mr. and Mrs. Pocket's children were not growing up or being brought up, but were tumbling up.

Mrs. Pocket was sitting on a garden chair under a tree, reading, with her legs upon another garden chair; and Mrs. Pocket's two nurse-maids were looking about them while the children played. "Mamma," said Herbert, "this is young Mr. Pip." Upon which Mrs. Pocket received me with an appearance of amiable dignity.

"Master Alick and Miss Jane," cried one of the nurses to two of the children, "if you go a bouncing up against them bushes you'll fall over into the river and be drownded, and what'll your pa say then?"

At the same time this nurse picked up Mrs. Pocket's handkerchief, and said, "If that don't make six times you've dropped it, Mum!" Upon which Mrs. Pocket laughed and said, "Thank you, Flopson," and settling herself in one chair only, resumed her book. Her countenance immediately assumed a knitted and intent expression as if she had been reading for a week, but before she could have read half a dozen lines, she fixed her eyes upon me, and said, "I hope your mamma is quite well?" This unexpected inquiry put me into such a difficulty that I began saying in the absurdest way that if there had been any such person I had no doubt she would have been quite well and would have been very much obliged and would have sent her compliments, when the nurse came to my rescue.

"Well!" she cried, picking up the pocket-handkerchief, "if that don't make seven times! What *are* you a doing of this afternoon, Mum!" Mrs. Pocket received her property, at first with a look of unutterable surprise as if she had never seen it before, and then with a laugh of recognition, and said, "Thank you, Flopson," and forgot me, and went on reading.

I found, now I had leisure to count them, that there were no fewer than six little Pockets present, in various stages of tumbling up. I had scarcely arrived at the total when a seventh was heard, as in the region of air, wailing dolefully.

"If there ain't Baby!" said Flopson, appearing to think it most surprising.

“Make haste up, Millers.”

Millers, who was the other nurse, retired into the house, and by degrees the child’s wailing was hushed and stopped, as if it were a young ventriloquist with something in its mouth. Mrs. Pocket read all the time, and I was curious to know what the book could be.

We were waiting, I supposed, for Mr. Pocket to come out to us; at any rate we waited there, and so I had an opportunity of observing the remarkable family phenomenon that whenever any of the children strayed near Mrs. Pocket in their play, they always tripped themselves up and tumbled over her,—always very much to her momentary astonishment, and their own more enduring lamentation. I was at a loss to account for this surprising circumstance, and could not help giving my mind to speculations about it, until by and by Millers came down with the baby, which baby was handed to Flopson, which Flopson was handing it to Mrs. Pocket, when she too went fairly head foremost over Mrs. Pocket, baby and all, and was caught by Herbert and myself.

“Gracious me, Flopson!” said Mrs. Pocket, looking off her book for a moment, “everybody’s tumbling!”

“Gracious you, indeed, Mum!” returned Flopson, very red in the face; “what have you got there?”

“I got here, Flopson?” asked Mrs. Pocket.

“Why, if it ain’t your footstool!” cried Flopson. “And if you keep it under your skirts like that, who’s to help tumbling? Here! Take the baby, Mum, and give me your book.”

Mrs. Pocket acted on the advice, and inexpertly danced the infant a little in her lap, while the other children played about it. This had lasted but a very short time, when Mrs. Pocket issued summary orders that they were all to be taken into the house for a nap. Thus I made the second discovery on that first occasion, that the nurture of the little Pockets consisted of alternately tumbling up and lying down.

Under these circumstances, when Flopson and Millers had got the children into the house, like a little flock of sheep, and Mr. Pocket came out of it to make my acquaintance, I was not much surprised to find that Mr. Pocket was a gentleman with a rather perplexed expression of face, and with his very gray hair disordered on his head, as if he didn’t quite see his way to putting anything straight.

Chapter XXIII

MR. POCKET SAID HE was glad to see me, and he hoped I was not sorry to see him. “For, I really am not,” he added, with his son’s smile, “an alarming personage.” He was a young-looking man, in spite of his perplexities and his very gray hair, and his manner seemed quite natural. I use the word natural, in the sense of its being unaffected; there was something comic in his distraught way, as though it would have been downright ludicrous but for his own perception that it was very near being so. When he had talked with me a little, he said to Mrs. Pocket, with a rather anxious contraction of his eyebrows, which were black and handsome, “Belinda, I hope you have welcomed Mr. Pip?” And she looked up from her book, and said, “Yes.” She then smiled upon me in an absent state of mind, and asked me if I liked the taste of orange-flower water? As the question had no bearing, near or remote, on any foregone or subsequent transaction, I consider it to have been thrown out, like her previous approaches, in general conversational condescension.

I found out within a few hours, and may mention at once, that Mrs. Pocket was the only daughter of a certain quite accidental deceased Knight, who had invented for himself a conviction that his deceased father would have been made a Baronet but for somebody’s determined opposition arising out of entirely personal motives,—I forget whose, if I ever knew,—the Sovereign’s, the Prime Minister’s, the Lord Chancellor’s, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s, anybody’s,—and had tacked himself on to the nobles of the earth in right of this quite supposititious fact. I believe he had been knighted himself for storming the English grammar at the point of the pen, in a desperate address engrossed on vellum, on the occasion of the laying of the first stone of some building or other, and for handing some Royal Personage either the trowel or the mortar. Be that as it may, he had

directed Mrs. Pocket to be brought up from her cradle as one who in the nature of things must marry a title, and who was to be guarded from the acquisition of plebeian domestic knowledge.

So successful a watch and ward had been established over the young lady by this judicious parent, that she had grown up highly ornamental, but perfectly helpless and useless. With her character thus happily formed, in the first bloom of her youth she had encountered Mr. Pocket: who was also in the first bloom of youth, and not quite decided whether to mount to the Woolsack, or to roof himself in with a mitre. As his doing the one or the other was a mere question of time, he and Mrs. Pocket had taken Time by the forelock (when, to judge from its length, it would seem to have wanted cutting), and had married without the knowledge of the judicious parent. The judicious parent, having nothing to bestow or withhold but his blessing, had handsomely settled that dower upon them after a short struggle, and had informed Mr. Pocket that his wife was “a treasure for a Prince.” Mr. Pocket had invested the Prince’s treasure in the ways of the world ever since, and it was supposed to have brought him in but indifferent interest. Still, Mrs. Pocket was in general the object of a queer sort of respectful pity, because she had not married a title; while Mr. Pocket was the object of a queer sort of forgiving reproach, because he had never got one.

Mr. Pocket took me into the house and showed me my room: which was a pleasant one, and so furnished as that I could use it with comfort for my own private sitting-room. He then knocked at the doors of two other similar rooms, and introduced me to their occupants, by name Drummle and Startop. Drummle, an old-looking young man of a heavy order of architecture, was whistling. Startop, younger in years and appearance, was reading and holding his head, as if he thought himself in danger of exploding it with too strong a charge of knowledge.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Pocket had such a noticeable air of being in somebody else’s hands, that I wondered who really was in possession of the house and let them live there, until I found this unknown power to be the servants. It was a smooth way of going on, perhaps, in respect of saving trouble; but it had the appearance of being expensive, for the servants felt it a duty they owed to themselves to be nice in their eating and drinking, and to keep a deal of company down stairs. They allowed a very liberal table to Mr. and Mrs. Pocket, yet it always appeared to me that by far the best part

of the house to have boarded in would have been the kitchen,—always supposing the boarder capable of self-defence, for, before I had been there a week, a neighboring lady with whom the family were personally unacquainted, wrote in to say that she had seen Millers slapping the baby. This greatly distressed Mrs. Pocket, who burst into tears on receiving the note, and said that it was an extraordinary thing that the neighbors couldn't mind their own business.

By degrees I learnt, and chiefly from Herbert, that Mr. Pocket had been educated at Harrow and at Cambridge, where he had distinguished himself; but that when he had had the happiness of marrying Mrs. Pocket very early in life, he had impaired his prospects and taken up the calling of a Grinder. After grinding a number of dull blades,—of whom it was remarkable that their fathers, when influential, were always going to help him to preferment, but always forgot to do it when the blades had left the Grindstone,—he had wearied of that poor work and had come to London. Here, after gradually failing in loftier hopes, he had "read" with divers who had lacked opportunities or neglected them, and had refurbished divers others for special occasions, and had turned his acquirements to the account of literary compilation and correction, and on such means, added to some very moderate private resources, still maintained the house I saw.

Mr. and Mrs. Pocket had a toady neighbor; a widow lady of that highly sympathetic nature that she agreed with everybody, blessed everybody, and shed smiles and tears on everybody, according to circumstances. This lady's name was Mrs. Coiler, and I had the honor of taking her down to dinner on the day of my installation. She gave me to understand on the stairs, that it was a blow to dear Mrs. Pocket that dear Mr. Pocket should be under the necessity of receiving gentlemen to read with him. That did not extend to me, she told me in a gush of love and confidence (at that time, I had known her something less than five minutes); if they were all like Me, it would be quite another thing.

"But dear Mrs. Pocket," said Mrs. Coiler, "after her early disappointment (not that dear Mr. Pocket was to blame in that), requires so much luxury and elegance—"

"Yes, ma'am," I said, to stop her, for I was afraid she was going to cry.

"And she is of so aristocratic a disposition—"

"Yes, ma'am," I said again, with the same object as before.

“—That it is hard,” said Mrs. Coiler, “to have dear Mr. Pocket’s time and attention diverted from dear Mrs. Pocket.”

I could not help thinking that it might be harder if the butcher’s time and attention were diverted from dear Mrs. Pocket; but I said nothing, and indeed had enough to do in keeping a bashful watch upon my company manners.

It came to my knowledge, through what passed between Mrs. Pocket and Drummle while I was attentive to my knife and fork, spoon, glasses, and other instruments of self-destruction, that Drummle, whose Christian name was Bentley, was actually the next heir but one to a baronetcy. It further appeared that the book I had seen Mrs. Pocket reading in the garden was all about titles, and that she knew the exact date at which her grandpapa would have come into the book, if he ever had come at all. Drummle didn’t say much, but in his limited way (he struck me as a sulky kind of fellow) he spoke as one of the elect, and recognized Mrs. Pocket as a woman and a sister. No one but themselves and Mrs. Coiler the toady neighbor showed any interest in this part of the conversation, and it appeared to me that it was painful to Herbert; but it promised to last a long time, when the page came in with the announcement of a domestic affliction. It was, in effect, that the cook had mislaid the beef. To my unutterable amazement, I now, for the first time, saw Mr. Pocket relieve his mind by going through a performance that struck me as very extraordinary, but which made no impression on anybody else, and with which I soon became as familiar as the rest. He laid down the carving-knife and fork,—being engaged in carving, at the moment,—put his two hands into his disturbed hair, and appeared to make an extraordinary effort to lift himself up by it. When he had done this, and had not lifted himself up at all, he quietly went on with what he was about.

Mrs. Coiler then changed the subject and began to flatter me. I liked it for a few moments, but she flattered me so very grossly that the pleasure was soon over. She had a serpentine way of coming close at me when she pretended to be vitally interested in the friends and localities I had left, which was altogether snaky and fork-tongued; and when she made an occasional bounce upon Startop (who said very little to her), or upon Drummle (who said less), I rather envied them for being on the opposite side of the table.

After dinner the children were introduced, and Mrs. Coiler made admiring comments on their eyes, noses, and legs,—a sagacious way of improving their minds. There were four little girls, and two little boys, besides the baby who might have been either, and the baby's next successor who was as yet neither. They were brought in by Flopson and Millers, much as though those two non-commissioned officers had been recruiting somewhere for children and had enlisted these, while Mrs. Pocket looked at the young Nobles that ought to have been as if she rather thought she had had the pleasure of inspecting them before, but didn't quite know what to make of them.

"Here! Give me your fork, Mum, and take the baby," said Flopson. "Don't take it that way, or you'll get its head under the table."

Thus advised, Mrs. Pocket took it the other way, and got its head upon the table; which was announced to all present by a prodigious concussion.

"Dear, dear! Give it me back, Mum," said Flopson; "and Miss Jane, come and dance to baby, do!"

One of the little girls, a mere mite who seemed to have prematurely taken upon herself some charge of the others, stepped out of her place by me, and danced to and from the baby until it left off crying, and laughed. Then, all the children laughed, and Mr. Pocket (who in the meantime had twice endeavored to lift himself up by the hair) laughed, and we all laughed and were glad.

Flopson, by dint of doubling the baby at the joints like a Dutch doll, then got it safely into Mrs. Pocket's lap, and gave it the nut-crackers to play with; at the same time recommending Mrs. Pocket to take notice that the handles of that instrument were not likely to agree with its eyes, and sharply charging Miss Jane to look after the same. Then, the two nurses left the room, and had a lively scuffle on the staircase with a dissipated page who had waited at dinner, and who had clearly lost half his buttons at the gaming-table.

I was made very uneasy in my mind by Mrs. Pocket's falling into a discussion with Drummle respecting two baronetcies, while she ate a sliced orange steeped in sugar and wine, and, forgetting all about the baby on her lap, who did most appalling things with the nut-crackers. At length little Jane, perceiving its young brains to be imperilled, softly left her place, and with many small artifices coaxed the dangerous weapon away. Mrs. Pocket

finishing her orange at about the same time, and not approving of this, said to Jane,—

"You naughty child, how dare you? Go and sit down this instant!"

"Mamma dear," lisped the little girl, "baby ood have put hith eyeth out."

"How dare you tell me so?" retorted Mrs. Pocket. "Go and sit down in your chair this moment!"

Mrs. Pocket's dignity was so crushing, that I felt quite abashed, as if I myself had done something to rouse it.

"Belinda," remonstrated Mr. Pocket, from the other end of the table, "how can you be so unreasonable? Jane only interfered for the protection of baby."

"I will not allow anybody to interfere," said Mrs. Pocket. "I am surprised, Matthew, that you should expose me to the affront of interference."

"Good God!" cried Mr. Pocket, in an outbreak of desolate desperation. "Are infants to be nut-crackered into their tombs, and is nobody to save them?"

"I will not be interfered with by Jane," said Mrs. Pocket, with a majestic glance at that innocent little offender. "I hope I know my poor grandpapa's position. Jane, indeed!"

Mr. Pocket got his hands in his hair again, and this time really did lift himself some inches out of his chair. "Hear this!" he helplessly exclaimed to the elements. "Babies are to be nut-crackered dead, for people's poor grandpapa's positions!" Then he let himself down again, and became silent.

We all looked awkwardly at the tablecloth while this was going on. A pause succeeded, during which the honest and irrepressible baby made a series of leaps and crows at little Jane, who appeared to me to be the only member of the family (irrespective of servants) with whom it had any decided acquaintance.

"Mr. Drummle," said Mrs. Pocket, "will you ring for Flopson? Jane, you undutiful little thing, go and lie down. Now, baby darling, come with ma!"

The baby was the soul of honor, and protested with all its might. It doubled itself up the wrong way over Mrs. Pocket's arm, exhibited a pair of knitted shoes and dimpled ankles to the company in lieu of its soft face, and was carried out in the highest state of mutiny. And it gained its point after all, for I saw it through the window within a few minutes, being nursed by

little Jane.

It happened that the other five children were left behind at the dinner-table, through Flopson's having some private engagement, and their not being anybody else's business. I thus became aware of the mutual relations between them and Mr. Pocket, which were exemplified in the following manner. Mr. Pocket, with the normal perplexity of his face heightened and his hair rumpled, looked at them for some minutes, as if he couldn't make out how they came to be boarding and lodging in that establishment, and why they hadn't been billeted by Nature on somebody else. Then, in a distant Missionary way he asked them certain questions,—as why little Joe had that hole in his frill, who said, Pa, Flopson was going to mend it when she had time,—and how little Fanny came by that whitlow, who said, Pa, Millers was going to poultice it when she didn't forget. Then, he melted into parental tenderness, and gave them a shilling apiece and told them to go and play; and then as they went out, with one very strong effort to lift himself up by the hair he dismissed the hopeless subject.

In the evening there was rowing on the river. As Drummle and Startop had each a boat, I resolved to set up mine, and to cut them both out. I was pretty good at most exercises in which country boys are adepts, but as I was conscious of wanting elegance of style for the Thames,—not to say for other waters,—I at once engaged to place myself under the tuition of the winner of a prize-wherry who plied at our stairs, and to whom I was introduced by my new allies. This practical authority confused me very much by saying I had the arm of a blacksmith. If he could have known how nearly the compliment lost him his pupil, I doubt if he would have paid it.

There was a supper-tray after we got home at night, and I think we should all have enjoyed ourselves, but for a rather disagreeable domestic occurrence. Mr. Pocket was in good spirits, when a housemaid came in, and said, "If you please, sir, I should wish to speak to you."

"Speak to your master?" said Mrs. Pocket, whose dignity was roused again. "How can you think of such a thing? Go and speak to Flopson. Or speak to me—at some other time."

"Begging your pardon, ma'am," returned the housemaid, "I should wish to speak at once, and to speak to master."

Hereupon, Mr. Pocket went out of the room, and we made the best of ourselves until he came back.

“This is a pretty thing, Belinda!” said Mr. Pocket, returning with a countenance expressive of grief and despair. “Here’s the cook lying insensibly drunk on the kitchen floor, with a large bundle of fresh butter made up in the cupboard ready to sell for grease!”

Mrs. Pocket instantly showed much amiable emotion, and said, “This is that odious Sophia’s doing!”

“What do you mean, Belinda?” demanded Mr. Pocket.

“Sophia has told you,” said Mrs. Pocket. “Did I not see her with my own eyes and hear her with my own ears, come into the room just now and ask to speak to you?”

“But has she not taken me down stairs, Belinda,” returned Mr. Pocket, “and shown me the woman, and the bundle too?”

“And do you defend her, Matthew,” said Mrs. Pocket, “for making mischief?”

Mr. Pocket uttered a dismal groan.

“Am I, grandpapa’s granddaughter, to be nothing in the house?” said Mrs. Pocket. “Besides, the cook has always been a very nice respectful woman, and said in the most natural manner when she came to look after the situation, that she felt I was born to be a Duchess.”

There was a sofa where Mr. Pocket stood, and he dropped upon it in the attitude of the Dying Gladiator. Still in that attitude he said, with a hollow voice, “Good night, Mr. Pip,” when I deemed it advisable to go to bed and leave him.

Chapter XXIV

AFTER TWO OR THREE days, when I had established myself in my room and had gone backwards and forwards to London several times, and had ordered all I wanted of my tradesmen, Mr. Pocket and I had a long talk together. He knew more of my intended career than I knew myself, for he referred to his having been told by Mr. Jaggers that I was not designed for any profession, and that I should be well enough educated for my destiny if I could "hold my own" with the average of young men in prosperous circumstances. I acquiesced, of course, knowing nothing to the contrary.

He advised my attending certain places in London, for the acquisition of such mere rudiments as I wanted, and my investing him with the functions of explainer and director of all my studies. He hoped that with intelligent assistance I should meet with little to discourage me, and should soon be able to dispense with any aid but his. Through his way of saying this, and much more to similar purpose, he placed himself on confidential terms with me in an admirable manner; and I may state at once that he was always so zealous and honorable in fulfilling his compact with me, that he made me zealous and honorable in fulfilling mine with him. If he had shown indifference as a master, I have no doubt I should have returned the compliment as a pupil; he gave me no such excuse, and each of us did the other justice. Nor did I ever regard him as having anything ludicrous about him—or anything but what was serious, honest, and good—in his tutor communication with me.

When these points were settled, and so far carried out as that I had begun to work in earnest, it occurred to me that if I could retain my bedroom in Barnard's Inn, my life would be agreeably varied, while my manners would be none the worse for Herbert's society. Mr. Pocket did not object to this arrangement, but urged that before any step could possibly be taken in it, it

must be submitted to my guardian. I felt that this delicacy arose out of the consideration that the plan would save Herbert some expense, so I went off to Little Britain and imparted my wish to Mr. Jaggers.

"If I could buy the furniture now hired for me," said I, "and one or two other little things, I should be quite at home there."

"Go it!" said Mr. Jaggers, with a short laugh. "I told you you'd get on. Well! How much do you want?"

I said I didn't know how much.

"Come!" retorted Mr. Jaggers. "How much? Fifty pounds?"

"O, not nearly so much."

"Five pounds?" said Mr. Jaggers.

This was such a great fall, that I said in discomfiture, "O, more than that."

"More than that, eh!" retorted Mr. Jaggers, lying in wait for me, with his hands in his pockets, his head on one side, and his eyes on the wall behind me; "how much more?"

"It is so difficult to fix a sum," said I, hesitating.

"Come!" said Mr. Jaggers. "Let's get at it. Twice five; will that do? Three times five; will that do? Four times five; will that do?"

I said I thought that would do handsomely.

"Four times five will do handsomely, will it?" said Mr. Jaggers, knitting his brows. "Now, what do you make of four times five?"

"What do I make of it?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Jaggers; "how much?"

"I suppose you make it twenty pounds," said I, smiling.

"Never mind what I make it, my friend," observed Mr. Jaggers, with a knowing and contradictory toss of his head. "I want to know what you make it."

"Twenty pounds, of course."

"Wemmick!" said Mr. Jaggers, opening his office door. "Take Mr. Pip's written order, and pay him twenty pounds."

This strongly marked way of doing business made a strongly marked impression on me, and that not of an agreeable kind. Mr. Jaggers never laughed; but he wore great bright creaking boots, and, in poising himself on these boots, with his large head bent down and his eyebrows joined together, awaiting an answer, he sometimes caused the boots to creak, as if

they laughed in a dry and suspicious way. As he happened to go out now, and as Wemmick was brisk and talkative, I said to Wemmick that I hardly knew what to make of Mr. Jaggers's manner.

"Tell him that, and he'll take it as a compliment," answered Wemmick; "he don't mean that you should know what to make of it.— Oh!" for I looked surprised, "it's not personal; it's professional: only professional."

Wemmick was at his desk, lunching—and crunching—on a dry hard biscuit; pieces of which he threw from time to time into his slit of a mouth, as if he were posting them.

"Always seems to me," said Wemmick, "as if he had set a man-trap and was watching it. Suddenly—click—you're caught!"

Without remarking that man-traps were not among the amenities of life, I said I supposed he was very skilful?

"Deep," said Wemmick, "as Australia." Pointing with his pen at the office floor, to express that Australia was understood, for the purposes of the figure, to be symmetrically on the opposite spot of the globe. "If there was anything deeper," added Wemmick, bringing his pen to paper, "he'd be it."

Then, I said I supposed he had a fine business, and Wemmick said, "Ca-pi-tal!" Then I asked if there were many clerks? to which he replied,—

"We don't run much into clerks, because there's only one Jaggers, and people won't have him at second hand. There are only four of us. Would you like to see 'em? You are one of us, as I may say."

I accepted the offer. When Mr. Wemmick had put all the biscuit into the post, and had paid me my money from a cash-box in a safe, the key of which safe he kept somewhere down his back and produced from his coat-collar like an iron-pigtail, we went up stairs. The house was dark and shabby, and the greasy shoulders that had left their mark in Mr. Jaggers's room seemed to have been shuffling up and down the staircase for years. In the front first floor, a clerk who looked something between a publican and a rat-catcher—a large pale, puffed, swollen man—was attentively engaged with three or four people of shabby appearance, whom he treated as unceremoniously as everybody seemed to be treated who contributed to Mr. Jaggers's coffers. "Getting evidence together," said Mr. Wemmick, as we came out, "for the Bailey." In the room over that, a little flabby terrier of a clerk with dangling hair (his cropping seemed to have been forgotten when

he was a puppy) was similarly engaged with a man with weak eyes, whom Mr. Wemmick presented to me as a smelter who kept his pot always boiling, and who would melt me anything I pleased,—and who was in an excessive white-perspiration, as if he had been trying his art on himself. In a back room, a high-shouldered man with a face-ache tied up in dirty flannel, who was dressed in old black clothes that bore the appearance of having been waxed, was stooping over his work of making fair copies of the notes of the other two gentlemen, for Mr. Jaggers's own use.

This was all the establishment. When we went down stairs again, Wemmick led me into my guardian's room, and said, "This you've seen already."

"Pray," said I, as the two odious casts with the twitchy leer upon them caught my sight again, "whose likenesses are those?"

"These?" said Wemmick, getting upon a chair, and blowing the dust off the horrible heads before bringing them down. "These are two celebrated ones. Famous clients of ours that got us a world of credit. This chap (why you must have come down in the night and been peeping into the inkstand, to get this blot upon your eyebrow, you old rascal!) murdered his master, and, considering that he wasn't brought up to evidence, didn't plan it badly."

"Is it like him?" I asked, recoiling from the brute, as Wemmick spat upon his eyebrow and gave it a rub with his sleeve.

"Like him? It's himself, you know. The cast was made in Newgate, directly after he was taken down. You had a particular fancy for me, hadn't you, Old Artful?" said Wemmick. He then explained this affectionate apostrophe, by touching his brooch representing the lady and the weeping willow at the tomb with the urn upon it, and saying, "Had it made for me, express!"

"Is the lady anybody?" said I.

"No," returned Wemmick. "Only his game. (You liked your bit of game, didn't you?) No; deuce a bit of a lady in the case, Mr. Pip, except one,—and she wasn't of this slender lady-like sort, and you wouldn't have caught her looking after this urn, unless there was something to drink in it." Wemmick's attention being thus directed to his brooch, he put down the cast, and polished the brooch with his pocket-handkerchief.

"Did that other creature come to the same end?" I asked. "He has the

same look."

"You're right," said Wemmick; "it's the genuine look. Much as if one nostril was caught up with a horse-hair and a little fish-hook. Yes, he came to the same end; quite the natural end here, I assure you. He forged wills, this blade did, if he didn't also put the supposed testators to sleep too. You were a gentlemanly Cove, though" (Mr. Wemmick was again apostrophizing), "and you said you could write Greek. Yah, Bounceable! What a liar you were! I never met such a liar as you!" Before putting his late friend on his shelf again, Wemmick touched the largest of his mourning rings and said, "Sent out to buy it for me, only the day before."

While he was putting up the other cast and coming down from the chair, the thought crossed my mind that all his personal jewelry was derived from like sources. As he had shown no diffidence on the subject, I ventured on the liberty of asking him the question, when he stood before me, dusting his hands.

"O yes," he returned, "these are all gifts of that kind. One brings another, you see; that's the way of it. I always take 'em. They're curiosities. And they're property. They may not be worth much, but, after all, they're property and portable. It don't signify to you with your brilliant lookout, but as to myself, my guiding-star always is, 'Get hold of portable property'."

When I had rendered homage to this light, he went on to say, in a friendly manner:—

"If at any odd time when you have nothing better to do, you wouldn't mind coming over to see me at Walworth, I could offer you a bed, and I should consider it an honor. I have not much to show you; but such two or three curiosities as I have got you might like to look over; and I am fond of a bit of garden and a summer-house."

I said I should be delighted to accept his hospitality.

"Thankee," said he; "then we'll consider that it's to come off, when convenient to you. Have you dined with Mr. Jaggers yet?"

"Not yet."

"Well," said Wemmick, "he'll give you wine, and good wine. I'll give you punch, and not bad punch. And now I'll tell you something. When you go to dine with Mr. Jaggers, look at his housekeeper."

"Shall I see something very uncommon?"

"Well," said Wemmick, "you'll see a wild beast tamed. Not so very

uncommon, you'll tell me. I reply, that depends on the original wildness of the beast, and the amount of taming. It won't lower your opinion of Mr. Jaggers's powers. Keep your eye on it."

I told him I would do so, with all the interest and curiosity that his preparation awakened. As I was taking my departure, he asked me if I would like to devote five minutes to seeing Mr. Jaggers "at it?"

For several reasons, and not least because I didn't clearly know what Mr. Jaggers would be found to be "at," I replied in the affirmative. We dived into the City, and came up in a crowded police-court, where a blood-relation (in the murderous sense) of the deceased, with the fanciful taste in brooches, was standing at the bar, uncomfortably chewing something; while my guardian had a woman under examination or cross-examination,—I don't know which,—and was striking her, and the bench, and everybody present, with awe. If anybody, of whatsoever degree, said a word that he didn't approve of, he instantly required to have it "taken down." If anybody wouldn't make an admission, he said, "I'll have it out of you!" and if anybody made an admission, he said, "Now I have got you!" The magistrates shivered under a single bite of his finger. Thieves and thief-takers hung in dread rapture on his words, and shrank when a hair of his eyebrows turned in their direction. Which side he was on I couldn't make out, for he seemed to me to be grinding the whole place in a mill; I only know that when I stole out on tiptoe, he was not on the side of the bench; for, he was making the legs of the old gentleman who presided, quite convulsive under the table, by his denunciations of his conduct as the representative of British law and justice in that chair that day.

Chapter XXV

BENTLEY DRUMMLE, WHO WAS so sulky a fellow that he even took up a book as if its writer had done him an injury, did not take up an acquaintance in a more agreeable spirit. Heavy in figure, movement, and comprehension,—in the sluggish complexion of his face, and in the large, awkward tongue that seemed to loll about in his mouth as he himself lolled about in a room,—he was idle, proud, niggardly, reserved, and suspicious. He came of rich people down in Somersetshire, who had nursed this combination of qualities until they made the discovery that it was just of age and a blockhead. Thus, Bentley Drummle had come to Mr. Pocket when he was a head taller than that gentleman, and half a dozen heads thicker than most gentlemen.

Startop had been spoilt by a weak mother and kept at home when he ought to have been at school, but he was devotedly attached to her, and admired her beyond measure. He had a woman's delicacy of feature, and was—"as you may see, though you never saw her," said Herbert to me —"exactly like his mother." It was but natural that I should take to him much more kindly than to Drummle, and that, even in the earliest evenings of our boating, he and I should pull homeward abreast of one another, conversing from boat to boat, while Bentley Drummle came up in our wake alone, under the overhanging banks and among the rushes. He would always creep in-shore like some uncomfortable amphibious creature, even when the tide would have sent him fast upon his way; and I always think of him as coming after us in the dark or by the back-water, when our own two boats were breaking the sunset or the moonlight in mid-stream.

Herbert was my intimate companion and friend. I presented him with a half-share in my boat, which was the occasion of his often coming down to Hammersmith; and my possession of a half-share in his chambers often took me up to London. We used to walk between the two places at all hours.

I have an affection for the road yet (though it is not so pleasant a road as it was then), formed in the impressibility of untried youth and hope.

When I had been in Mr. Pocket's family a month or two, Mr. and Mrs. Camilla turned up. Camilla was Mr. Pocket's sister. Georgiana, whom I had seen at Miss Havisham's on the same occasion, also turned up. She was a cousin,—an indigestive single woman, who called her rigidity religion, and her liver love. These people hated me with the hatred of cupidity and disappointment. As a matter of course, they fawned upon me in my prosperity with the basest meanness. Towards Mr. Pocket, as a grown-up infant with no notion of his own interests, they showed the complacent forbearance I had heard them express. Mrs. Pocket they held in contempt; but they allowed the poor soul to have been heavily disappointed in life, because that shed a feeble reflected light upon themselves.

These were the surroundings among which I settled down, and applied myself to my education. I soon contracted expensive habits, and began to spend an amount of money that within a few short months I should have thought almost fabulous; but through good and evil I stuck to my books. There was no other merit in this, than my having sense enough to feel my deficiencies. Between Mr. Pocket and Herbert I got on fast; and, with one or the other always at my elbow to give me the start I wanted, and clear obstructions out of my road, I must have been as great a dolt as Drummle if I had done less.

I had not seen Mr. Wemmick for some weeks, when I thought I would write him a note and propose to go home with him on a certain evening. He replied that it would give him much pleasure, and that he would expect me at the office at six o'clock. Thither I went, and there I found him, putting the key of his safe down his back as the clock struck.

"Did you think of walking down to Walworth?" said he.

"Certainly," said I, "if you approve."

"Very much," was Wemmick's reply, "for I have had my legs under the desk all day, and shall be glad to stretch them. Now, I'll tell you what I have got for supper, Mr. Pip. I have got a stewed steak,—which is of home preparation,—and a cold roast fowl,—which is from the cook's-shop. I think it's tender, because the master of the shop was a Juryman in some cases of ours the other day, and we let him down easy. I reminded him of it when I bought the fowl, and I said, 'Pick us out a good one, old Briton,

because if we had chosen to keep you in the box another day or two, we could easily have done it.' He said to that, 'Let me make you a present of the best fowl in the shop.' I let him, of course. As far as it goes, it's property and portable. You don't object to an aged parent, I hope?"

I really thought he was still speaking of the fowl, until he added, "Because I have got an aged parent at my place." I then said what politeness required.

"So, you haven't dined with Mr. Jaggers yet?" he pursued, as we walked along.

"Not yet."

"He told me so this afternoon when he heard you were coming. I expect you'll have an invitation to-morrow. He's going to ask your pals, too. Three of 'em; ain't there?"

Although I was not in the habit of counting Drummle as one of my intimate associates, I answered, "Yes."

"Well, he's going to ask the whole gang,"—I hardly felt complimented by the word,—"and whatever he gives you, he'll give you good. Don't look forward to variety, but you'll have excellence. And there's another rum thing in his house," proceeded Wemmick, after a moment's pause, as if the remark followed on the housekeeper understood; "he never lets a door or window be fastened at night."

"Is he never robbed?"

"That's it!" returned Wemmick. "He says, and gives it out publicly, 'I want to see the man who'll rob me.' Lord bless you, I have heard him, a hundred times, if I have heard him once, say to regular cracksmen in our front office, 'You know where I live; now, no bolt is ever drawn there; why don't you do a stroke of business with me? Come; can't I tempt you?' Not a man of them, sir, would be bold enough to try it on, for love or money."

"They dread him so much?" said I.

"Dread him," said Wemmick. "I believe you they dread him. Not but what he's artful, even in his defiance of them. No silver, sir. Britannia metal, every spoon."

"So they wouldn't have much," I observed, "even if they—"

"Ah! But he would have much," said Wemmick, cutting me short, "and they know it. He'd have their lives, and the lives of scores of 'em. He'd have all he could get. And it's impossible to say what he couldn't get, if he

gave his mind to it."

I was falling into meditation on my guardian's greatness, when Wemmick remarked:—

"As to the absence of plate, that's only his natural depth, you know. A river's its natural depth, and he's his natural depth. Look at his watch-chain. That's real enough."

"It's very massive," said I.

"Massive?" repeated Wemmick. "I think so. And his watch is a gold repeater, and worth a hundred pound if it's worth a penny. Mr. Pip, there are about seven hundred thieves in this town who know all about that watch; there's not a man, a woman, or a child, among them, who wouldn't identify the smallest link in that chain, and drop it as if it was red hot, if inveigled into touching it."

At first with such discourse, and afterwards with conversation of a more general nature, did Mr. Wemmick and I beguile the time and the road, until he gave me to understand that we had arrived in the district of Walworth.

It appeared to be a collection of back lanes, ditches, and little gardens, and to present the aspect of a rather dull retirement. Wemmick's house was a little wooden cottage in the midst of plots of garden, and the top of it was cut out and painted like a battery mounted with guns.

"My own doing," said Wemmick. "Looks pretty; don't it?"

I highly commended it, I think it was the smallest house I ever saw; with the queerest gothic windows (by far the greater part of them sham), and a gothic door almost too small to get in at.

"That's a real flagstaff, you see," said Wemmick, "and on Sundays I run up a real flag. Then look here. After I have crossed this bridge, I hoist it up —so—and cut off the communication."

The bridge was a plank, and it crossed a chasm about four feet wide and two deep. But it was very pleasant to see the pride with which he hoisted it up and made it fast; smiling as he did so, with a relish and not merely mechanically.

"At nine o'clock every night, Greenwich time," said Wemmick, "the gun fires. There he is, you see! And when you hear him go, I think you'll say he's a Stinger."

The piece of ordnance referred to, was mounted in a separate fortress, constructed of lattice-work. It was protected from the weather by an

ingenious little tarpaulin contrivance in the nature of an umbrella.

“Then, at the back,” said Wemmick, “out of sight, so as not to impede the idea of fortifications,—for it’s a principle with me, if you have an idea, carry it out and keep it up,—I don’t know whether that’s your opinion—”

I said, decidedly.

“—At the back, there’s a pig, and there are fowls and rabbits; then, I knock together my own little frame, you see, and grow cucumbers; and you’ll judge at supper what sort of a salad I can raise. So, sir,” said Wemmick, smiling again, but seriously too, as he shook his head, “if you can suppose the little place besieged, it would hold out a devil of a time in point of provisions.”

Then, he conducted me to a bower about a dozen yards off, but which was approached by such ingenious twists of path that it took quite a long time to get at; and in this retreat our glasses were already set forth. Our punch was cooling in an ornamental lake, on whose margin the bower was raised. This piece of water (with an island in the middle which might have been the salad for supper) was of a circular form, and he had constructed a fountain in it, which, when you set a little mill going and took a cork out of a pipe, played to that powerful extent that it made the back of your hand quite wet.

“I am my own engineer, and my own carpenter, and my own plumber, and my own gardener, and my own Jack of all Trades,” said Wemmick, in acknowledging my compliments. “Well; it’s a good thing, you know. It brushes the Newgate cobwebs away, and pleases the Aged. You wouldn’t mind being at once introduced to the Aged, would you? It wouldn’t put you out?”

I expressed the readiness I felt, and we went into the castle. There we found, sitting by a fire, a very old man in a flannel coat: clean, cheerful, comfortable, and well cared for, but intensely deaf.

“Well aged parent,” said Wemmick, shaking hands with him in a cordial and jocose way, “how am you?”

“All right, John; all right!” replied the old man.

“Here’s Mr. Pip, aged parent,” said Wemmick, “and I wish you could hear his name. Nod away at him, Mr. Pip; that’s what he likes. Nod away at him, if you please, like winking!”

“This is a fine place of my son’s, sir,” cried the old man, while I nodded

as hard as I possibly could. “This is a pretty pleasure-ground, sir. This spot and these beautiful works upon it ought to be kept together by the Nation, after my son’s time, for the people’s enjoyment.”

“You’re as proud of it as Punch; ain’t you, Aged?” said Wemmick, contemplating the old man, with his hard face really softened; “there’s a nod for you;” giving him a tremendous one; “there’s another for you;” giving him a still more tremendous one; “you like that, don’t you? If you’re not tired, Mr. Pip—though I know it’s tiring to strangers—will you tip him one more? You can’t think how it pleases him.”

I tipped him several more, and he was in great spirits. We left him bestirring himself to feed the fowls, and we sat down to our punch in the arbor; where Wemmick told me, as he smoked a pipe, that it had taken him a good many years to bring the property up to its present pitch of perfection.

“Is it your own, Mr. Wemmick?”

“O yes,” said Wemmick, “I have got hold of it, a bit at a time. It’s a freehold, by George!”

“Is it indeed? I hope Mr. Jaggers admires it?”

“Never seen it,” said Wemmick. “Never heard of it. Never seen the Aged. Never heard of him. No; the office is one thing, and private life is another. When I go into the office, I leave the Castle behind me, and when I come into the Castle, I leave the office behind me. If it’s not in any way disagreeable to you, you’ll oblige me by doing the same. I don’t wish it professionally spoken about.”

Of course I felt my good faith involved in the observance of his request. The punch being very nice, we sat there drinking it and talking, until it was almost nine o’clock. “Getting near gun-fire,” said Wemmick then, as he laid down his pipe; “it’s the Aged’s treat.”

Proceeding into the Castle again, we found the Aged heating the poker, with expectant eyes, as a preliminary to the performance of this great nightly ceremony. Wemmick stood with his watch in his hand until the moment was come for him to take the red-hot poker from the Aged, and repair to the battery. He took it, and went out, and presently the Stinger went off with a Bang that shook the crazy little box of a cottage as if it must fall to pieces, and made every glass and teacup in it ring. Upon this, the Aged—who I believe would have been blown out of his arm-chair but for holding on by the elbows—cried out exultingly, “He’s fired! I heerd him!”

and I nodded at the old gentleman until it is no figure of speech to declare that I absolutely could not see him.

The interval between that time and supper Wemmick devoted to showing me his collection of curiosities. They were mostly of a felonious character; comprising the pen with which a celebrated forgery had been committed, a distinguished razor or two, some locks of hair, and several manuscript confessions written under condemnation,—upon which Mr. Wemmick set particular value as being, to use his own words, “every one of ’em Lies, sir.” These were agreeably dispersed among small specimens of china and glass, various neat trifles made by the proprietor of the museum, and some tobacco-stoppers carved by the Aged. They were all displayed in that chamber of the Castle into which I had been first inducted, and which served, not only as the general sitting-room but as the kitchen too, if I might judge from a saucepan on the hob, and a brazen bijou over the fireplace designed for the suspension of a roasting-jack.

There was a neat little girl in attendance, who looked after the Aged in the day. When she had laid the supper-cloth, the bridge was lowered to give her means of egress, and she withdrew for the night. The supper was excellent; and though the Castle was rather subject to dry-rot insomuch that it tasted like a bad nut, and though the pig might have been farther off, I was heartily pleased with my whole entertainment. Nor was there any drawback on my little turret bedroom, beyond there being such a very thin ceiling between me and the flagstaff, that when I lay down on my back in bed, it seemed as if I had to balance that pole on my forehead all night.

Wemmick was up early in the morning, and I am afraid I heard him cleaning my boots. After that, he fell to gardening, and I saw him from my gothic window pretending to employ the Aged, and nodding at him in a most devoted manner. Our breakfast was as good as the supper, and at half-past eight precisely we started for Little Britain. By degrees, Wemmick got dryer and harder as we went along, and his mouth tightened into a post-office again. At last, when we got to his place of business and he pulled out his key from his coat-collar, he looked as unconscious of his Walworth property as if the Castle and the drawbridge and the arbor and the lake and the fountain and the Aged, had all been blown into space together by the last discharge of the Stinger.

Chapter XXVI

IT FELL OUT AS Wemmick had told me it would, that I had an early opportunity of comparing my guardian's establishment with that of his cashier and clerk. My guardian was in his room, washing his hands with his scented soap, when I went into the office from Walworth; and he called me to him, and gave me the invitation for myself and friends which Wemmick had prepared me to receive. "No ceremony," he stipulated, "and no dinner dress, and say to-morrow." I asked him where we should come to (for I had no idea where he lived), and I believe it was in his general objection to make anything like an admission, that he replied, "Come here, and I'll take you home with me." I embrace this opportunity of remarking that he washed his clients off, as if he were a surgeon or a dentist. He had a closet in his room, fitted up for the purpose, which smelt of the scented soap like a perfumer's shop. It had an unusually large jack-towel on a roller inside the door, and he would wash his hands, and wipe them and dry them all over this towel, whenever he came in from a police court or dismissed a client from his room. When I and my friends repaired to him at six o'clock next day, he seemed to have been engaged on a case of a darker complexion than usual, for we found him with his head butted into this closet, not only washing his hands, but laving his face and gargling his throat. And even when he had done all that, and had gone all round the jack-towel, he took out his penknife and scraped the case out of his nails before he put his coat on.

There were some people slinking about as usual when we passed out into the street, who were evidently anxious to speak with him; but there was something so conclusive in the halo of scented soap which encircled his presence, that they gave it up for that day. As we walked along westward, he was recognized ever and again by some face in the crowd of the streets,

and whenever that happened he talked louder to me; but he never otherwise recognized anybody, or took notice that anybody recognized him.

He conducted us to Gerrard Street, Soho, to a house on the south side of that street. Rather a stately house of its kind, but dolefully in want of painting, and with dirty windows. He took out his key and opened the door, and we all went into a stone hall, bare, gloomy, and little used. So, up a dark brown staircase into a series of three dark brown rooms on the first floor. There were carved garlands on the panelled walls, and as he stood among them giving us welcome, I know what kind of loops I thought they looked like.

Dinner was laid in the best of these rooms; the second was his dressing-room; the third, his bedroom. He told us that he held the whole house, but rarely used more of it than we saw. The table was comfortably laid—no silver in the service, of course—and at the side of his chair was a capacious dumb-waiter, with a variety of bottles and decanters on it, and four dishes of fruit for dessert. I noticed throughout, that he kept everything under his own hand, and distributed everything himself.

There was a bookcase in the room; I saw from the backs of the books, that they were about evidence, criminal law, criminal biography, trials, acts of Parliament, and such things. The furniture was all very solid and good, like his watch-chain. It had an official look, however, and there was nothing merely ornamental to be seen. In a corner was a little table of papers with a shaded lamp: so that he seemed to bring the office home with him in that respect too, and to wheel it out of an evening and fall to work.

As he had scarcely seen my three companions until now,—for he and I had walked together,—he stood on the hearth-rug, after ringing the bell, and took a searching look at them. To my surprise, he seemed at once to be principally if not solely interested in Drummle.

“Pip,” said he, putting his large hand on my shoulder and moving me to the window, “I don’t know one from the other. Who’s the Spider?”

“The spider?” said I.

“The blotchy, sprawly, sulky fellow.”

“That’s Bentley Drummle,” I replied; “the one with the delicate face is Startop.”

Not making the least account of “the one with the delicate face,” he returned, “Bentley Drummle is his name, is it? I like the look of that

fellow.”

He immediately began to talk to Drummle: not at all deterred by his replying in his heavy reticent way, but apparently led on by it to screw discourse out of him. I was looking at the two, when there came between me and them the housekeeper, with the first dish for the table.

She was a woman of about forty, I supposed,—but I may have thought her younger than she was. Rather tall, of a lithe nimble figure, extremely pale, with large faded eyes, and a quantity of streaming hair. I cannot say whether any diseased affection of the heart caused her lips to be parted as if she were panting, and her face to bear a curious expression of suddenness and flutter; but I know that I had been to see Macbeth at the theatre, a night or two before, and that her face looked to me as if it were all disturbed by fiery air, like the faces I had seen rise out of the Witches’ caldron.

She set the dish on, touched my guardian quietly on the arm with a finger to notify that dinner was ready, and vanished. We took our seats at the round table, and my guardian kept Drummle on one side of him, while Startop sat on the other. It was a noble dish of fish that the housekeeper had put on table, and we had a joint of equally choice mutton afterwards, and then an equally choice bird. Sauces, wines, all the accessories we wanted, and all of the best, were given out by our host from his dumb-waiter; and when they had made the circuit of the table, he always put them back again. Similarly, he dealt us clean plates and knives and forks, for each course, and dropped those just disused into two baskets on the ground by his chair. No other attendant than the housekeeper appeared. She set on every dish; and I always saw in her face, a face rising out of the caldron. Years afterwards, I made a dreadful likeness of that woman, by causing a face that had no other natural resemblance to it than it derived from flowing hair to pass behind a bowl of flaming spirits in a dark room.

Induced to take particular notice of the housekeeper, both by her own striking appearance and by Wemmick’s preparation, I observed that whenever she was in the room she kept her eyes attentively on my guardian, and that she would remove her hands from any dish she put before him, hesitatingly, as if she dreaded his calling her back, and wanted him to speak when she was nigh, if he had anything to say. I fancied that I could detect in his manner a consciousness of this, and a purpose of always holding her in suspense.

Dinner went off gayly, and although my guardian seemed to follow rather than originate subjects, I knew that he wrenched the weakest part of our dispositions out of us. For myself, I found that I was expressing my tendency to lavish expenditure, and to patronize Herbert, and to boast of my great prospects, before I quite knew that I had opened my lips. It was so with all of us, but with no one more than Drummle: the development of whose inclination to gird in a grudging and suspicious way at the rest, was screwed out of him before the fish was taken off.

It was not then, but when we had got to the cheese, that our conversation turned upon our rowing feats, and that Drummle was rallied for coming up behind of a night in that slow amphibious way of his. Drummle upon this, informed our host that he much preferred our room to our company, and that as to skill he was more than our master, and that as to strength he could scatter us like chaff. By some invisible agency, my guardian wound him up to a pitch little short of ferocity about this trifle; and he fell to baring and spanning his arm to show how muscular it was, and we all fell to baring and spanning our arms in a ridiculous manner.

Now the housekeeper was at that time clearing the table; my guardian, taking no heed of her, but with the side of his face turned from her, was leaning back in his chair biting the side of his forefinger and showing an interest in Drummle, that, to me, was quite inexplicable. Suddenly, he clapped his large hand on the housekeeper's, like a trap, as she stretched it across the table. So suddenly and smartly did he do this, that we all stopped in our foolish contention.

"If you talk of strength," said Mr. Jaggers, "I'll show you a wrist. Molly, let them see your wrist."

Her entrapped hand was on the table, but she had already put her other hand behind her waist. "Master," she said, in a low voice, with her eyes attentively and entreatingly fixed upon him. "Don't."

"I'll show you a wrist," repeated Mr. Jaggers, with an immovable determination to show it. "Molly, let them see your wrist."

"Master," she again murmured. "Please!"

"Molly," said Mr. Jaggers, not looking at her, but obstinately looking at the opposite side of the room, "let them see both your wrists. Show them. Come!"

He took his hand from hers, and turned that wrist up on the table. She

brought her other hand from behind her, and held the two out side by side. The last wrist was much disfigured,—deeply scarred and scarred across and across. When she held her hands out she took her eyes from Mr. Jaggers, and turned them watchfully on every one of the rest of us in succession.

“There’s power here,” said Mr. Jaggers, coolly tracing out the sinews with his forefinger. “Very few men have the power of wrist that this woman has. It’s remarkable what mere force of grip there is in these hands. I have had occasion to notice many hands; but I never saw stronger in that respect, man’s or woman’s, than these.”

While he said these words in a leisurely, critical style, she continued to look at every one of us in regular succession as we sat. The moment he ceased, she looked at him again. “That’ll do, Molly,” said Mr. Jaggers, giving her a slight nod; “you have been admired, and can go.” She withdrew her hands and went out of the room, and Mr. Jaggers, putting the decanters on from his dumb-waiter, filled his glass and passed round the wine.

“At half-past nine, gentlemen,” said he, “we must break up. Pray make the best use of your time. I am glad to see you all. Mr. Drummle, I drink to you.”

If his object in singling out Drummle were to bring him out still more, it perfectly succeeded. In a sulky triumph, Drummle showed his morose depreciation of the rest of us, in a more and more offensive degree, until he became downright intolerable. Through all his stages, Mr. Jaggers followed him with the same strange interest. He actually seemed to serve as a zest to Mr. Jaggers’s wine.

In our boyish want of discretion I dare say we took too much to drink, and I know we talked too much. We became particularly hot upon some boorish sneer of Drummle’s, to the effect that we were too free with our money. It led to my remarking, with more zeal than discretion, that it came with a bad grace from him, to whom Startop had lent money in my presence but a week or so before.

“Well,” retorted Drummle; “he’ll be paid.”

“I don’t mean to imply that he won’t,” said I, “but it might make you hold your tongue about us and our money, I should think.”

“You should think!” retorted Drummle. “Oh Lord!”

“I dare say,” I went on, meaning to be very severe, “that you wouldn’t

lend money to any of us if we wanted it."

"You are right," said Drummle. "I wouldn't lend one of you a sixpence. I wouldn't lend anybody a sixpence."

"Rather mean to borrow under those circumstances, I should say."

"You should say," repeated Drummle. "Oh Lord!"

This was so very aggravating—the more especially as I found myself making no way against his surly obtuseness—that I said, disregarding Herbert's efforts to check me,—

"Come, Mr. Drummle, since we are on the subject, I'll tell you what passed between Herbert here and me, when you borrowed that money."

"I don't want to know what passed between Herbert there and you," growled Drummle. And I think he added in a lower growl, that we might both go to the devil and shake ourselves.

"I'll tell you, however," said I, "whether you want to know or not. We said that as you put it in your pocket very glad to get it, you seemed to be immensely amused at his being so weak as to lend it."

Drummle laughed outright, and sat laughing in our faces, with his hands in his pockets and his round shoulders raised; plainly signifying that it was quite true, and that he despised us as asses all.

Hereupon Startop took him in hand, though with a much better grace than I had shown, and exhorted him to be a little more agreeable. Startop, being a lively, bright young fellow, and Drummle being the exact opposite, the latter was always disposed to resent him as a direct personal affront. He now retorted in a coarse, lumpish way, and Startop tried to turn the discussion aside with some small pleasantry that made us all laugh. Resenting this little success more than anything, Drummle, without any threat or warning, pulled his hands out of his pockets, dropped his round shoulders, swore, took up a large glass, and would have flung it at his adversary's head, but for our entertainer's dexterously seizing it at the instant when it was raised for that purpose.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Jaggers, deliberately putting down the glass, and hauling out his gold repeater by its massive chain, "I am exceedingly sorry to announce that it's half past nine."

On this hint we all rose to depart. Before we got to the street door, Startop was cheerily calling Drummle "old boy," as if nothing had happened. But the old boy was so far from responding, that he would not

even walk to Hammersmith on the same side of the way; so Herbert and I, who remained in town, saw them going down the street on opposite sides; Startop leading, and Drummle lagging behind in the shadow of the houses, much as he was wont to follow in his boat.

As the door was not yet shut, I thought I would leave Herbert there for a moment, and run up stairs again to say a word to my guardian. I found him in his dressing-room surrounded by his stock of boots, already hard at it, washing his hands of us.

I told him I had come up again to say how sorry I was that anything disagreeable should have occurred, and that I hoped he would not blame me much.

"Pooh!" said he, sluicing his face, and speaking through the water-drops; "it's nothing, Pip. I like that Spider though."

He had turned towards me now, and was shaking his head, and blowing, and towelling himself.

"I am glad you like him, sir," said I—"but I don't."

"No, no," my guardian assented; "don't have too much to do with him. Keep as clear of him as you can. But I like the fellow, Pip; he is one of the true sort. Why, if I was a fortune-teller—"

Looking out of the towel, he caught my eye.

"But I am not a fortune-teller," he said, letting his head drop into a festoon of towel, and towelling away at his two ears. "You know what I am, don't you? Good night, Pip."

"Good night, sir."

In about a month after that, the Spider's time with Mr. Pocket was up for good, and, to the great relief of all the house but Mrs. Pocket, he went home to the family hole.

Chapter XXVII

“MY DEAR MR PIP:—

“I write this by request of Mr. Gargery, for to let you know that he is going to London in company with Mr. Wopsle and would be glad if agreeable to be allowed to see you. He would call at Barnard’s Hotel Tuesday morning at nine o’clock, when if not agreeable please leave word. Your poor sister is much the same as when you left. We talk of you in the kitchen every night, and wonder what you are saying and doing. If now considered in the light of a liberty, excuse it for the love of poor old days. No more, dear Mr. Pip, from your ever obliged, and affectionate servant,

“BIDDY.”

“P.S. He wishes me most particular to write what larks. He says you will understand. I hope and do not doubt it will be agreeable to see him, even though a gentleman, for you had ever a good heart, and he is a worthy, worthy man. I have read him all, excepting only the last little sentence, and he wishes me most particular to write again what larks.”

I received this letter by the post on Monday morning, and therefore its appointment was for next day. Let me confess exactly with what feelings I looked forward to Joe’s coming.

Not with pleasure, though I was bound to him by so many ties; no; with considerable disturbance, some mortification, and a keen sense of incongruity. If I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money. My greatest reassurance was that he was coming to Barnard’s Inn, not to Hammersmith, and consequently would not fall in Bentley Drummle’s way. I had little objection to his being seen by Herbert or his father, for both of whom I had a respect; but I had the sharpest sensitiveness as to his being seen by Drummle, whom I held in contempt. So, throughout life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually

committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise.

I had begun to be always decorating the chambers in some quite unnecessary and inappropriate way or other, and very expensive those wrestles with Barnard proved to be. By this time, the rooms were vastly different from what I had found them, and I enjoyed the honor of occupying a few prominent pages in the books of a neighboring upholsterer. I had got on so fast of late, that I had even started a boy in boots,—top boots,—in bondage and slavery to whom I might have been said to pass my days. For, after I had made the monster (out of the refuse of my washerwoman's family), and had clothed him with a blue coat, canary waistcoat, white cravat, creamy breeches, and the boots already mentioned, I had to find him a little to do and a great deal to eat; and with both of those horrible requirements he haunted my existence.

This avenging phantom was ordered to be on duty at eight on Tuesday morning in the hall, (it was two feet square, as charged for floorcloth,) and Herbert suggested certain things for breakfast that he thought Joe would like. While I felt sincerely obliged to him for being so interested and considerate, I had an odd half-provoked sense of suspicion upon me, that if Joe had been coming to see him, he wouldn't have been quite so brisk about it.

However, I came into town on the Monday night to be ready for Joe, and I got up early in the morning, and caused the sitting-room and breakfast-table to assume their most splendid appearance. Unfortunately the morning was drizzly, and an angel could not have concealed the fact that Barnard was shedding sooty tears outside the window, like some weak giant of a Sweep.

As the time approached I should have liked to run away, but the Avenger pursuant to orders was in the hall, and presently I heard Joe on the staircase. I knew it was Joe, by his clumsy manner of coming up stairs,—his state boots being always too big for him,—and by the time it took him to read the names on the other floors in the course of his ascent. When at last he stopped outside our door, I could hear his finger tracing over the painted letters of my name, and I afterwards distinctly heard him breathing in at the keyhole. Finally he gave a faint single rap, and Pepper—such was the compromising name of the avenging boy—announced "Mr. Gargery!" I thought he never would have done wiping his feet, and that I must have

gone out to lift him off the mat, but at last he came in.

"Joe, how are you, Joe?"

"Pip, how *air* you, Pip?"

With his good honest face all glowing and shining, and his hat put down on the floor between us, he caught both my hands and worked them straight up and down, as if I had been the last-patented Pump.

"I am glad to see you, Joe. Give me your hat."

But Joe, taking it up carefully with both hands, like a bird's-nest with eggs in it, wouldn't hear of parting with that piece of property, and persisted in standing talking over it in a most uncomfortable way.

"Which you have that growed," said Joe, "and that swelled, and that gentle-folked;" Joe considered a little before he discovered this word; "as to be sure you are a honor to your king and country."

"And you, Joe, look wonderfully well."

"Thank God," said Joe, "I'm ekerval to most. And your sister, she's no worse than she were. And Biddy, she's ever right and ready. And all friends is no backerder, if not no forarder. 'Ceptin Wopsle; he's had a drop."

All this time (still with both hands taking great care of the bird's-nest), Joe was rolling his eyes round and round the room, and round and round the flowered pattern of my dressing-gown.

"Had a drop, Joe?"

"Why yes," said Joe, lowering his voice, "he's left the Church and went into the playacting. Which the playacting have likeways brought him to London along with me. And his wish were," said Joe, getting the bird's-nest under his left arm for the moment, and groping in it for an egg with his right; "if no offence, as I would 'and you that."

I took what Joe gave me, and found it to be the crumpled play-bill of a small metropolitan theatre, announcing the first appearance, in that very week, of "the celebrated Provincial Amateur of Roscian renown, whose unique performance in the highest tragic walk of our National Bard has lately occasioned so great a sensation in local dramatic circles."

"Were you at his performance, Joe?" I inquired.

"I were," said Joe, with emphasis and solemnity.

"Was there a great sensation?"

"Why," said Joe, "yes, there certainly were a peck of orange-peel. Partickler when he see the ghost. Though I put it to yourself, sir, whether it

were calc'lated to keep a man up to his work with a good hart, to be continiwally cutting in betwixt him and the Ghost with 'Amen!' A man may have had a misfortun' and been in the Church," said Joe, lowering his voice to an argumentative and feeling tone, "but that is no reason why you should put him out at such a time. Which I meantersay, if the ghost of a man's own father cannot be allowed to claim his attention, what can, Sir? Still more, when his mourning 'at is unfortunately made so small as that the weight of the black feathers brings it off, try to keep it on how you may."

A ghost-seeing effect in Joe's own countenance informed me that Herbert had entered the room. So, I presented Joe to Herbert, who held out his hand; but Joe backed from it, and held on by the bird's-nest.

"Your servant, Sir," said Joe, "which I hope as you and Pip"—here his eye fell on the Avenger, who was putting some toast on table, and so plainly denoted an intention to make that young gentleman one of the family, that I frowned it down and confused him more—"I meantersay, you two gentlemen,—which I hope as you get your elths in this close spot? For the present may be a werry good inn, according to London opinions," said Joe, confidentially, "and I believe its character do stand it; but I wouldn't keep a pig in it myself,—not in the case that I wished him to fatten wholesome and to eat with a meller flavor on him."

Having borne this flattering testimony to the merits of our dwelling-place, and having incidentally shown this tendency to call me "sir," Joe, being invited to sit down to table, looked all round the room for a suitable spot on which to deposit his hat,—as if it were only on some very few rare substances in nature that it could find a resting place,—and ultimately stood it on an extreme corner of the chimney-piece, from which it ever afterwards fell off at intervals.

"Do you take tea, or coffee, Mr. Gargery?" asked Herbert, who always presided of a morning.

"Thankee, Sir," said Joe, stiff from head to foot, "I'll take whichever is most agreeable to yourself."

"What do you say to coffee?"

"Thankee, Sir," returned Joe, evidently dispirited by the proposal, "since you are so kind as make chice of coffee, I will not run contrairy to your own opinions. But don't you never find it a little 'eating?"

"Say tea then," said Herbert, pouring it out.

Here Joe's hat tumbled off the mantel-piece, and he started out of his chair and picked it up, and fitted it to the same exact spot. As if it were an absolute point of good breeding that it should tumble off again soon.

"When did you come to town, Mr. Gargery?"

"Were it yesterday afternoon?" said Joe, after coughing behind his hand, as if he had had time to catch the whooping-cough since he came. "No it were not. Yes it were. Yes. It were yesterday afternoon" (with an appearance of mingled wisdom, relief, and strict impartiality).

"Have you seen anything of London yet?"

"Why, yes, Sir," said Joe, "me and Wopsle went off straight to look at the Blacking Ware'us. But we didn't find that it come up to its likeness in the red bills at the shop doors; which I meantersay," added Joe, in an explanatory manner, "as it is there drawd too architectooralooral."

I really believe Joe would have prolonged this word (mightily expressive to my mind of some architecture that I know) into a perfect Chorus, but for his attention being providentially attracted by his hat, which was toppling. Indeed, it demanded from him a constant attention, and a quickness of eye and hand, very like that exacted by wicket-keeping. He made extraordinary play with it, and showed the greatest skill; now, rushing at it and catching it neatly as it dropped; now, merely stopping it midway, beating it up, and humoring it in various parts of the room and against a good deal of the pattern of the paper on the wall, before he felt it safe to close with it; finally splashing it into the slop-basin, where I took the liberty of laying hands upon it.

As to his shirt-collar, and his coat-collar, they were perplexing to reflect upon,—insoluble mysteries both. Why should a man scrape himself to that extent, before he could consider himself full dressed? Why should he suppose it necessary to be purified by suffering for his holiday clothes? Then he fell into such unaccountable fits of meditation, with his fork midway between his plate and his mouth; had his eyes attracted in such strange directions; was afflicted with such remarkable coughs; sat so far from the table, and dropped so much more than he ate, and pretended that he hadn't dropped it; that I was heartily glad when Herbert left us for the City.

I had neither the good sense nor the good feeling to know that this was all my fault, and that if I had been easier with Joe, Joe would have been

easier with me. I felt impatient of him and out of temper with him; in which condition he heaped coals of fire on my head.

"Us two being now alone, sir,"—began Joe.

"Joe," I interrupted, pettishly, "how can you call me, sir?"

Joe looked at me for a single instant with something faintly like reproach. Utterly preposterous as his cravat was, and as his collars were, I was conscious of a sort of dignity in the look.

"Us two being now alone," resumed Joe, "and me having the intentions and abilities to stay not many minutes more, I will now conclude—leastways begin—to mention what have led to my having had the present honor. For was it not," said Joe, with his old air of lucid exposition, "that my only wish were to be useful to you, I should not have had the honor of breaking wittles in the company and abode of gentlemen."

I was so unwilling to see the look again, that I made no remonstrance against this tone.

"Well, sir," pursued Joe, "this is how it were. I were at the Bargemen t'other night, Pip;"—whenever he subsided into affection, he called me Pip, and whenever he relapsed into politeness he called me sir; "when there come up in his shay-cart, Pumblechook. Which that same identical," said Joe, going down a new track, "do comb my 'air the wrong way sometimes, awful, by giving out up and down town as it were him which ever had your infant companionation and were looked upon as a playfellow by yourself."

"Nonsense. It was you, Joe."

"Which I fully believed it were, Pip," said Joe, slightly tossing his head, "though it signify little now, sir. Well, Pip; this same identical, which his manners is given to blusterous, come to me at the Bargemen (wot a pipe and a pint of beer do give refreshment to the workingman, sir, and do not over stimilate), and his word were, 'Joseph, Miss Havisham she wish to speak to you.'"

"Miss Havisham, Joe?"

"'She wish,' were Pumblechook's word, 'to speak to you.'" Joe sat and rolled his eyes at the ceiling.

"Yes, Joe? Go on, please."

"Next day, sir," said Joe, looking at me as if I were a long way off, "having cleaned myself, I go and I see Miss A."

"Miss A., Joe? Miss Havisham?"

“Which I say, sir,” replied Joe, with an air of legal formality, as if he were making his will, “Miss A., or otherways Havisham. Her expression air then as follering: ‘Mr. Gargery. You air in correspondence with Mr. Pip?’ Having had a letter from you, I were able to say ‘I am.’ (When I married your sister, sir, I said ‘I will;’ and when I answered your friend, Pip, I said ‘I am.’) ‘Would you tell him, then,’ said she, ‘that which Estella has come home and would be glad to see him.’”

I felt my face fire up as I looked at Joe. I hope one remote cause of its firing may have been my consciousness that if I had known his errand, I should have given him more encouragement.

“Biddy,” pursued Joe, “when I got home and asked her fur to write the message to you, a little hung back. Biddy says, ‘I know he will be very glad to have it by word of mouth, it is holiday time, you want to see him, go!’ I have now concluded, sir,” said Joe, rising from his chair, “and, Pip, I wish you ever well and ever prospering to a greater and a greater height.”

“But you are not going now, Joe?”

“Yes I am,” said Joe.

“But you are coming back to dinner, Joe?”

“No I am not,” said Joe.

Our eyes met, and all the “Sir” melted out of that manly heart as he gave me his hand.

“Pip, dear old chap, life is made of ever so many partings welded together, as I may say, and one man’s a blacksmith, and one’s a whitesmith, and one’s a goldsmith, and one’s a coppersmith. Diwisions among such must come, and must be met as they come. If there’s been any fault at all to-day, it’s mine. You and me is not two figures to be together in London; nor yet anywheres else but what is private, and beknown, and understood among friends. It ain’t that I am proud, but that I want to be right, as you shall never see me no more in these clothes. I’m wrong in these clothes. I’m wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th’ meshes. You won’t find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress, with my hammer in my hand, or even my pipe. You won’t find half so much fault in me if, supposing as you should ever wish to see me, you come and put your head in at the forge window and see Joe the blacksmith, there, at the old anvil, in the old burnt apron, sticking to the old work. I’m awful dull, but I hope I’ve beat out something nigh the rights of this at last. And so *God* bless you,

dear old Pip, old chap, *God* bless you!”

I had not been mistaken in my fancy that there was a simple dignity in him. The fashion of his dress could no more come in its way when he spoke these words than it could come in its way in Heaven. He touched me gently on the forehead, and went out. As soon as I could recover myself sufficiently, I hurried out after him and looked for him in the neighboring streets; but he was gone.

Chapter XXVIII

IT WAS CLEAR THAT I must repair to our town next day, and in the first flow of my repentance, it was equally clear that I must stay at Joe's. But, when I had secured my box-place by to-morrow's coach, and had been down to Mr. Pocket's and back, I was not by any means convinced on the last point, and began to invent reasons and make excuses for putting up at the Blue Boar. I should be an inconvenience at Joe's; I was not expected, and my bed would not be ready; I should be too far from Miss Havisham's, and she was exacting and mightn't like it. All other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self-swindlers, and with such pretences did I cheat myself. Surely a curious thing. That I should innocently take a bad half-crown of somebody else's manufacture is reasonable enough; but that I should knowingly reckon the spurious coin of my own make as good money! An obliging stranger, under pretence of compactly folding up my bank-notes for security's sake, abstracts the notes and gives me nutshells; but what is his sleight of hand to mine, when I fold up my own nutshells and pass them on myself as notes!

Having settled that I must go to the Blue Boar, my mind was much disturbed by indecision whether or not to take the Avenger. It was tempting to think of that expensive Mercenary publicly airing his boots in the archway of the Blue Boar's posting-yard; it was almost solemn to imagine him casually produced in the tailor's shop, and confounding the disrespectful senses of Trabb's boy. On the other hand, Trabb's boy might worm himself into his intimacy and tell him things; or, reckless and desperate wretch as I knew he could be, might hoot him in the High Street. My patroness, too, might hear of him, and not approve. On the whole, I resolved to leave the Avenger behind.

It was the afternoon coach by which I had taken my place, and, as winter

had now come round, I should not arrive at my destination until two or three hours after dark. Our time of starting from the Cross Keys was two o'clock. I arrived on the ground with a quarter of an hour to spare, attended by the Avenger,—if I may connect that expression with one who never attended on me if he could possibly help it.

At that time it was customary to carry Convicts down to the dock-yards by stage-coach. As I had often heard of them in the capacity of outside passengers, and had more than once seen them on the high road dangling their ironed legs over the coach roof, I had no cause to be surprised when Herbert, meeting me in the yard, came up and told me there were two convicts going down with me. But I had a reason that was an old reason now for constitutionally faltering whenever I heard the word "convict."

"You don't mind them, Handel?" said Herbert.

"O no!"

"I thought you seemed as if you didn't like them?"

"I can't pretend that I do like them, and I suppose you don't particularly. But I don't mind them."

"See! There they are," said Herbert, "coming out of the Tap. What a degraded and vile sight it is!"

They had been treating their guard, I suppose, for they had a gaoler with them, and all three came out wiping their mouths on their hands. The two convicts were handcuffed together, and had irons on their legs,—irons of a pattern that I knew well. They wore the dress that I likewise knew well. Their keeper had a brace of pistols, and carried a thick-knobbed bludgeon under his arm; but he was on terms of good understanding with them, and stood with them beside him, looking on at the putting-to of the horses, rather with an air as if the convicts were an interesting Exhibition not formally open at the moment, and he the Curator. One was a taller and stouter man than the other, and appeared as a matter of course, according to the mysterious ways of the world, both convict and free, to have had allotted to him the smaller suit of clothes. His arms and legs were like great pincushions of those shapes, and his attire disguised him absurdly; but I knew his half-closed eye at one glance. There stood the man whom I had seen on the settle at the Three Jolly Bargemen on a Saturday night, and who had brought me down with his invisible gun!

It was easy to make sure that as yet he knew me no more than if he had

never seen me in his life. He looked across at me, and his eye appraised my watch-chain, and then he incidentally spat and said something to the other convict, and they laughed and slued themselves round with a clink of their coupling manacle, and looked at something else. The great numbers on their backs, as if they were street doors; their coarse mangy ungainly outer surface, as if they were lower animals; their ironed legs, apologetically garlanded with pocket-handkerchiefs; and the way in which all present looked at them and kept from them; made them (as Herbert had said) a most disagreeable and degraded spectacle.

But this was not the worst of it. It came out that the whole of the back of the coach had been taken by a family removing from London, and that there were no places for the two prisoners but on the seat in front behind the coachman. Hereupon, a choleric gentleman, who had taken the fourth place on that seat, flew into a most violent passion, and said that it was a breach of contract to mix him up with such villainous company, and that it was poisonous, and pernicious, and infamous, and shameful, and I don't know what else. At this time the coach was ready and the coachman impatient, and we were all preparing to get up, and the prisoners had come over with their keeper,—bringing with them that curious flavor of bread-poultice, baize, rope-yarn, and hearthstone, which attends the convict presence.

"Don't take it so much amiss, sir," pleaded the keeper to the angry passenger; "I'll sit next you myself. I'll put 'em on the outside of the row. They won't interfere with you, sir. You needn't know they're there."

"And don't blame me," growled the convict I had recognized. "I don't want to go. I am quite ready to stay behind. As fur as I am concerned any one's welcome to my place."

"Or mine," said the other, gruffly. "I wouldn't have incommoded none of you, if I'd had my way." Then they both laughed, and began cracking nuts, and spitting the shells about.— As I really think I should have liked to do myself, if I had been in their place and so despised.

At length, it was voted that there was no help for the angry gentleman, and that he must either go in his chance company or remain behind. So he got into his place, still making complaints, and the keeper got into the place next him, and the convicts hauled themselves up as well as they could, and the convict I had recognized sat behind me with his breath on the hair of my head.

“Good by, Handel!” Herbert called out as we started. I thought what a blessed fortune it was, that he had found another name for me than Pip.

It is impossible to express with what acuteness I felt the convict’s breathing, not only on the back of my head, but all along my spine. The sensation was like being touched in the marrow with some pungent and searching acid, it set my very teeth on edge. He seemed to have more breathing business to do than another man, and to make more noise in doing it; and I was conscious of growing high-shouldered on one side, in my shrinking endeavors to fend him off.

The weather was miserably raw, and the two cursed the cold. It made us all lethargic before we had gone far, and when we had left the Half-way House behind, we habitually dozed and shivered and were silent. I dozed off, myself, in considering the question whether I ought to restore a couple of pounds sterling to this creature before losing sight of him, and how it could best be done. In the act of dipping forward as if I were going to bathe among the horses, I woke in a fright and took the question up again.

But I must have lost it longer than I had thought, since, although I could recognize nothing in the darkness and the fitful lights and shadows of our lamps, I traced marsh country in the cold damp wind that blew at us. Cowering forward for warmth and to make me a screen against the wind, the convicts were closer to me than before. The very first words I heard them interchange as I became conscious, were the words of my own thought, “Two One Pound notes.”

“How did he get ’em?” said the convict I had never seen.

“How should I know?” returned the other. “He had ’em stowed away somehows. Giv him by friends, I expect.”

“I wish,” said the other, with a bitter curse upon the cold, “that I had ’em here.”

“Two one pound notes, or friends?”

“Two one pound notes. I’d sell all the friends I ever had for one, and think it a blessed good bargain. Well? So he says—?”

“So he says,” resumed the convict I had recognized,—“it was all said and done in half a minute, behind a pile of timber in the Dock-yard, —‘You’re a going to be discharged?’ Yes, I was. Would I find out that boy that had fed him and kep his secret, and give him them two one pound notes? Yes, I would. And I did.”

“More fool you,” growled the other. “I’d have spent ’em on a Man, in wittles and drink. He must have been a green one. Mean to say he knowed nothing of you?”

“Not a ha’porth. Different gangs and different ships. He was tried again for prison breaking, and got made a Lifer.”

“And was that—Honor!—the only time you worked out, in this part of the country?”

“The only time.”

“What might have been your opinion of the place?”

“A most beastly place. Mudbank, mist, swamp, and work; work, swamp, mist, and mudbank.”

They both execrated the place in very strong language, and gradually growled themselves out, and had nothing left to say.

After overhearing this dialogue, I should assuredly have got down and been left in the solitude and darkness of the highway, but for feeling certain that the man had no suspicion of my identity. Indeed, I was not only so changed in the course of nature, but so differently dressed and so differently circumstanced, that it was not at all likely he could have known me without accidental help. Still, the coincidence of our being together on the coach, was sufficiently strange to fill me with a dread that some other coincidence might at any moment connect me, in his hearing, with my name. For this reason, I resolved to alight as soon as we touched the town, and put myself out of his hearing. This device I executed successfully. My little portmanteau was in the boot under my feet; I had but to turn a hinge to get it out; I threw it down before me, got down after it, and was left at the first lamp on the first stones of the town pavement. As to the convicts, they went their way with the coach, and I knew at what point they would be spirited off to the river. In my fancy, I saw the boat with its convict crew waiting for them at the slime-washed stairs,—again heard the gruff “Give way, you!” like and order to dogs,—again saw the wicked Noah’s Ark lying out on the black water.

I could not have said what I was afraid of, for my fear was altogether undefined and vague, but there was great fear upon me. As I walked on to the hotel, I felt that a dread, much exceeding the mere apprehension of a painful or disagreeable recognition, made me tremble. I am confident that it took no distinctness of shape, and that it was the revival for a few minutes

of the terror of childhood.

The coffee-room at the Blue Boar was empty, and I had not only ordered my dinner there, but had sat down to it, before the waiter knew me. As soon as he had apologized for the remissness of his memory, he asked me if he should send Boots for Mr. Pumblechook?

“No,” said I, “certainly not.”

The waiter (it was he who had brought up the Great Remonstrance from the Commercials, on the day when I was bound) appeared surprised, and took the earliest opportunity of putting a dirty old copy of a local newspaper so directly in my way, that I took it up and read this paragraph:—

Our readers will learn, not altogether without interest, in reference to the recent romantic rise in fortune of a young artificer in iron of this neighborhood (what a theme, by the way, for the magic pen of our as yet not universally acknowledged townsman *Tooby*, the poet of our columns!) that the youth’s earliest patron, companion, and friend, was a highly respected individual not entirely unconnected with the corn and seed trade, and whose eminently convenient and commodious business premises are situate within a hundred miles of the High Street. It is not wholly irrespective of our personal feelings that we record *him* as the Mentor of our young Telemachus, for it is good to know that our town produced the founder of the latter’s fortunes. Does the thought-contracted brow of the local Sage or the lustrous eye of local Beauty inquire whose fortunes? We believe that Quintin Matsys was the *Blacksmith* of Antwerp. VERB. SAP.

I entertain a conviction, based upon large experience, that if in the days of my prosperity I had gone to the North Pole, I should have met somebody there, wandering Esquimaux or civilized man, who would have told me that Pumblechook was my earliest patron and the founder of my fortunes.

Chapter XXIX

BETIMES IN THE MORNING I was up and out. It was too early yet to go to Miss Havisham's, so I loitered into the country on Miss Havisham's side of town, —which was not Joe's side; I could go there to-morrow,—thinking about my patroness, and painting brilliant pictures of her plans for me.

She had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a-going and the cold hearths a-blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin,—in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess. I had stopped to look at the house as I passed; and its seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong green ivy clasping even the stacks of chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms, had made up a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero. Estella was the inspiration of it, and the heart of it, of course. But, though she had taken such strong possession of me, though my fancy and my hope were so set upon her, though her influence on my boyish life and character had been all-powerful, I did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed. I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clew by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth. According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The unqualified truth is, that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me than if I had devoutly believed her to be human

perfection.

I so shaped out my walk as to arrive at the gate at my old time. When I had rung at the bell with an unsteady hand, I turned my back upon the gate, while I tried to get my breath and keep the beating of my heart moderately quiet. I heard the side-door open, and steps come across the courtyard; but I pretended not to hear, even when the gate swung on its rusty hinges.

Being at last touched on the shoulder, I started and turned. I started much more naturally then, to find myself confronted by a man in a sober gray dress. The last man I should have expected to see in that place of porter at Miss Havisham's door.

"Orlick!"

"Ah, young master, there's more changes than yours. But come in, come in. It's opposed to my orders to hold the gate open."

I entered and he swung it, and locked it, and took the key out. "Yes!" said he, facing round, after doggedly preceding me a few steps towards the house. "Here I am!"

"How did you come here?"

"I come her," he retorted, "on my legs. I had my box brought alongside me in a barrow."

"Are you here for good?"

"I ain't here for harm, young master, I suppose?"

I was not so sure of that. I had leisure to entertain the retort in my mind, while he slowly lifted his heavy glance from the pavement, up my legs and arms, to my face.

"Then you have left the forge?" I said.

"Do this look like a forge?" replied Orlick, sending his glance all round him with an air of injury. "Now, do it look like it?"

I asked him how long he had left Gargery's forge?

"One day is so like another here," he replied, "that I don't know without casting it up. However, I come here some time since you left."

"I could have told you that, Orlick."

"Ah!" said he, dryly. "But then you've got to be a scholar."

By this time we had come to the house, where I found his room to be one just within the side-door, with a little window in it looking on the courtyard. In its small proportions, it was not unlike the kind of place usually assigned to a gate-porter in Paris. Certain keys were hanging on the wall, to which he

now added the gate key; and his patchwork-covered bed was in a little inner division or recess. The whole had a slovenly, confined, and sleepy look, like a cage for a human dormouse; while he, looming dark and heavy in the shadow of a corner by the window, looked like the human dormouse for whom it was fitted up,—as indeed he was.

"I never saw this room before," I remarked; "but there used to be no Porter here."

"No," said he; "not till it got about that there was no protection on the premises, and it come to be considered dangerous, with convicts and Tag and Rag and Bobtail going up and down. And then I was recommended to the place as a man who could give another man as good as he brought, and I took it. It's easier than bellowsing and hammering.— That's loaded, that is."

My eye had been caught by a gun with a brass-bound stock over the chimney-piece, and his eye had followed mine.

"Well," said I, not desirous of more conversation, "shall I go up to Miss Havisham?"

"Burn me, if I know!" he retorted, first stretching himself and then shaking himself; "my orders ends here, young master. I give this here bell a rap with this here hammer, and you go on along the passage till you meet somebody."

"I am expected, I believe?"

"Burn me twice over, if I can say!" said he.

Upon that, I turned down the long passage which I had first trodden in my thick boots, and he made his bell sound. At the end of the passage, while the bell was still reverberating, I found Sarah Pocket, who appeared to have now become constitutionally green and yellow by reason of me.

"Oh!" said she. "You, is it, Mr. Pip?"

"It is, Miss Pocket. I am glad to tell you that Mr. Pocket and family are all well."

"Are they any wiser?" said Sarah, with a dismal shake of the head; "they had better be wiser, than well. Ah, Matthew, Matthew! You know your way, sir?"

Tolerably, for I had gone up the staircase in the dark, many a time. I ascended it now, in lighter boots than of yore, and tapped in my old way at the door of Miss Havisham's room. "Pip's rap," I heard her say,

immediately; “come in, Pip.”

She was in her chair near the old table, in the old dress, with her two hands crossed on her stick, her chin resting on them, and her eyes on the fire. Sitting near her, with the white shoe, that had never been worn, in her hand, and her head bent as she looked at it, was an elegant lady whom I had never seen.

“Come in, Pip,” Miss Havisham continued to mutter, without looking round or up; “come in, Pip, how do you do, Pip? so you kiss my hand as if I were a queen, eh?—Well?”

She looked up at me suddenly, only moving her eyes, and repeated in a grimly playful manner,—

“Well?”

“I heard, Miss Havisham,” said I, rather at a loss, “that you were so kind as to wish me to come and see you, and I came directly.”

“Well?”

The lady whom I had never seen before, lifted up her eyes and looked archly at me, and then I saw that the eyes were Estella’s eyes. But she was so much changed, was so much more beautiful, so much more womanly, in all things winning admiration, had made such wonderful advance, that I seemed to have made none. I fancied, as I looked at her, that I slipped hopelessly back into the coarse and common boy again. O the sense of distance and disparity that came upon me, and the inaccessibility that came about her!

She gave me her hand. I stammered something about the pleasure I felt in seeing her again, and about my having looked forward to it, for a long, long time.

“Do you find her much changed, Pip?” asked Miss Havisham, with her greedy look, and striking her stick upon a chair that stood between them, as a sign to me to sit down there.

“When I came in, Miss Havisham, I thought there was nothing of Estella in the face or figure; but now it all settles down so curiously into the old—”

“What? You are not going to say into the old Estella?” Miss Havisham interrupted. “She was proud and insulting, and you wanted to go away from her. Don’t you remember?”

I said confusedly that that was long ago, and that I knew no better then, and the like. Estella smiled with perfect composure, and said she had no

doubt of my having been quite right, and of her having been very disagreeable.

“Is he changed?” Miss Havisham asked her.

“Very much,” said Estella, looking at me.

“Less coarse and common?” said Miss Havisham, playing with Estella’s hair.

Estella laughed, and looked at the shoe in her hand, and laughed again, and looked at me, and put the shoe down. She treated me as a boy still, but she lured me on.

We sat in the dreamy room among the old strange influences which had so wrought upon me, and I learnt that she had but just come home from France, and that she was going to London. Proud and wilful as of old, she had brought those qualities into such subjection to her beauty that it was impossible and out of nature—or I thought so—to separate them from her beauty. Truly it was impossible to dissociate her presence from all those wretched hankerings after money and gentility that had disturbed my boyhood,—from all those ill-regulated aspirations that had first made me ashamed of home and Joe,—from all those visions that had raised her face in the glowing fire, struck it out of the iron on the anvil, extracted it from the darkness of night to look in at the wooden window of the forge, and flit away. In a word, it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or in the present, from the innermost life of my life.

It was settled that I should stay there all the rest of the day, and return to the hotel at night, and to London to-morrow. When we had conversed for a while, Miss Havisham sent us two out to walk in the neglected garden: on our coming in by and by, she said, I should wheel her about a little, as in times of yore.

So, Estella and I went out into the garden by the gate through which I had strayed to my encounter with the pale young gentleman, now Herbert; I, trembling in spirit and worshipping the very hem of her dress; she, quite composed and most decidedly not worshipping the hem of mine. As we drew near to the place of encounter, she stopped and said,—

“I must have been a singular little creature to hide and see that fight that day; but I did, and I enjoyed it very much.”

“You rewarded me very much.”

“Did I?” she replied, in an incidental and forgetful way. “I remember I

entertained a great objection to your adversary, because I took it ill that he should be brought here to pester me with his company."

"He and I are great friends now."

"Are you? I think I recollect though, that you read with his father?"

"Yes."

I made the admission with reluctance, for it seemed to have a boyish look, and she already treated me more than enough like a boy.

"Since your change of fortune and prospects, you have changed your companions," said Estella.

"Naturally," said I.

"And necessarily," she added, in a haughty tone; "what was fit company for you once, would be quite unfit company for you now."

In my conscience, I doubt very much whether I had any lingering intention left of going to see Joe; but if I had, this observation put it to flight.

"You had no idea of your impending good fortune, in those times?" said Estella, with a slight wave of her hand, signifying in the fighting times.

"Not the least."

The air of completeness and superiority with which she walked at my side, and the air of youthfulness and submission with which I walked at hers, made a contrast that I strongly felt. It would have rankled in me more than it did, if I had not regarded myself as eliciting it by being so set apart for her and assigned to her.

The garden was too overgrown and rank for walking in with ease, and after we had made the round of it twice or thrice, we came out again into the brewery yard. I showed her to a nicety where I had seen her walking on the casks, that first old day, and she said, with a cold and careless look in that direction, "Did I?" I reminded her where she had come out of the house and given me my meat and drink, and she said, "I don't remember." "Not remember that you made me cry?" said I. "No," said she, and shook her head and looked about her. I verily believe that her not remembering and not minding in the least, made me cry again, inwardly,—and that is the sharpest crying of all.

"You must know," said Estella, condescending to me as a brilliant and beautiful woman might, "that I have no heart,—if that has anything to do with my memory."

I got through some jargon to the effect that I took the liberty of doubting that. That I knew better. That there could be no such beauty without it.

“Oh! I have a heart to be stabbed in or shot in, I have no doubt,” said Estella, “and of course if it ceased to beat I should cease to be. But you know what I mean. I have no softness there, no—sympathy—sentiment—nonsense.”

What was it that was borne in upon my mind when she stood still and looked attentively at me? Anything that I had seen in Miss Havisham? No. In some of her looks and gestures there was that tinge of resemblance to Miss Havisham which may often be noticed to have been acquired by children, from grown person with whom they have been much associated and secluded, and which, when childhood is passed, will produce a remarkable occasional likeness of expression between faces that are otherwise quite different. And yet I could not trace this to Miss Havisham. I looked again, and though she was still looking at me, the suggestion was gone.

What was it?

“I am serious,” said Estella, not so much with a frown (for her brow was smooth) as with a darkening of her face; “if we are to be thrown much together, you had better believe it at once. No!” imperiously stopping me as I opened my lips. “I have not bestowed my tenderness anywhere. I have never had any such thing.”

In another moment we were in the brewery, so long disused, and she pointed to the high gallery where I had seen her going out on that same first day, and told me she remembered to have been up there, and to have seen me standing scared below. As my eyes followed her white hand, again the same dim suggestion that I could not possibly grasp crossed me. My involuntary start occasioned her to lay her hand upon my arm. Instantly the ghost passed once more and was gone.

What was it?

“What is the matter?” asked Estella. “Are you scared again?”

“I should be, if I believed what you said just now,” I replied, to turn it off.

“Then you don’t? Very well. It is said, at any rate. Miss Havisham will soon be expecting you at your old post, though I think that might be laid aside now, with other old belongings. Let us make one more round of the

garden, and then go in. Come! You shall not shed tears for my cruelty to-day; you shall be my Page, and give me your shoulder."

Her handsome dress had trailed upon the ground. She held it in one hand now, and with the other lightly touched my shoulder as we walked. We walked round the ruined garden twice or thrice more, and it was all in bloom for me. If the green and yellow growth of weed in the chinks of the old wall had been the most precious flowers that ever blew, it could not have been more cherished in my remembrance.

There was no discrepancy of years between us to remove her far from me; we were of nearly the same age, though of course the age told for more in her case than in mine; but the air of inaccessibility which her beauty and her manner gave her, tormented me in the midst of my delight, and at the height of the assurance I felt that our patroness had chosen us for one another. Wretched boy!

At last we went back into the house, and there I heard, with surprise, that my guardian had come down to see Miss Havisham on business, and would come back to dinner. The old wintry branches of chandeliers in the room where the mouldering table was spread had been lighted while we were out, and Miss Havisham was in her chair and waiting for me.

It was like pushing the chair itself back into the past, when we began the old slow circuit round about the ashes of the bridal feast. But, in the funereal room, with that figure of the grave fallen back in the chair fixing its eyes upon her, Estella looked more bright and beautiful than before, and I was under stronger enchantment.

The time so melted away, that our early dinner-hour drew close at hand, and Estella left us to prepare herself. We had stopped near the centre of the long table, and Miss Havisham, with one of her withered arms stretched out of the chair, rested that clenched hand upon the yellow cloth. As Estella looked back over her shoulder before going out at the door, Miss Havisham kissed that hand to her, with a ravenous intensity that was of its kind quite dreadful.

Then, Estella being gone and we two left alone, she turned to me, and said in a whisper,—

"Is she beautiful, graceful, well-grown? Do you admire her?"

"Everybody must who sees her, Miss Havisham."

She drew an arm round my neck, and drew my head close down to hers

as she sat in the chair. “Love her, love her, love her! How does she use you?”

Before I could answer (if I could have answered so difficult a question at all) she repeated, “Love her, love her, love her! If she favors you, love her. If she wounds you, love her. If she tears your heart to pieces,—and as it gets older and stronger it will tear deeper,—love her, love her, love her!”

Never had I seen such passionate eagerness as was joined to her utterance of these words. I could feel the muscles of the thin arm round my neck swell with the vehemence that possessed her.

“Hear me, Pip! I adopted her, to be loved. I bred her and educated her, to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved. Love her!”

She said the word often enough, and there could be no doubt that she meant to say it; but if the often repeated word had been hate instead of love —despair—revenge—dire death—it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse.

“I’ll tell you,” said she, in the same hurried passionate whisper, “what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter—as I did!”

When she came to that, and to a wild cry that followed that, I caught her round the waist. For she rose up in the chair, in her shroud of a dress, and struck at the air as if she would as soon have struck herself against the wall and fallen dead.

All this passed in a few seconds. As I drew her down into her chair, I was conscious of a scent that I knew, and turning, saw my guardian in the room.

He always carried (I have not yet mentioned it, I think) a pocket-handkerchief of rich silk and of imposing proportions, which was of great value to him in his profession. I have seen him so terrify a client or a witness by ceremoniously unfolding this pocket-handkerchief as if he were immediately going to blow his nose, and then pausing, as if he knew he should not have time to do it before such client or witness committed himself, that the self-committal has followed directly, quite as a matter of course. When I saw him in the room he had this expressive pocket-handkerchief in both hands, and was looking at us. On meeting my eye, he

said plainly, by a momentary and silent pause in that attitude, “Indeed? Singular!” and then put the handkerchief to its right use with wonderful effect.

Miss Havisham had seen him as soon as I, and was (like everybody else) afraid of him. She made a strong attempt to compose herself, and stammered that he was as punctual as ever.

“As punctual as ever,” he repeated, coming up to us. “(How do you do, Pip? Shall I give you a ride, Miss Havisham? Once round?) And so you are here, Pip?”

I told him when I had arrived, and how Miss Havisham had wished me to come and see Estella. To which he replied, “Ah! Very fine young lady!” Then he pushed Miss Havisham in her chair before him, with one of his large hands, and put the other in his trousers-pocket as if the pocket were full of secrets.

“Well, Pip! How often have you seen Miss Estella before?” said he, when he came to a stop.

“How often?”

“Ah! How many times? Ten thousand times?”

“Oh! Certainly not so many.”

“Twice?”

“Jaggers,” interposed Miss Havisham, much to my relief, “leave my Pip alone, and go with him to your dinner.”

He complied, and we groped our way down the dark stairs together. While we were still on our way to those detached apartments across the paved yard at the back, he asked me how often I had seen Miss Havisham eat and drink; offering me a breadth of choice, as usual, between a hundred times and once.

I considered, and said, “Never.”

“And never will, Pip,” he retorted, with a frowning smile. “She has never allowed herself to be seen doing either, since she lived this present life of hers. She wanders about in the night, and then lays hands on such food as she takes.”

“Pray, sir,” said I, “may I ask you a question?”

“You may,” said he, “and I may decline to answer it. Put your question.”

“Estella’s name. Is it Havisham or—?” I had nothing to add.

“Or what?” said he.

“Is it Havisham?”

“It is Havisham.”

This brought us to the dinner-table, where she and Sarah Pocket awaited us. Mr. Jaggers presided, Estella sat opposite to him, I faced my green and yellow friend. We dined very well, and were waited on by a maid-servant whom I had never seen in all my comings and goings, but who, for anything I know, had been in that mysterious house the whole time. After dinner a bottle of choice old port was placed before my guardian (he was evidently well acquainted with the vintage), and the two ladies left us.

Anything to equal the determined reticence of Mr. Jaggers under that roof I never saw elsewhere, even in him. He kept his very looks to himself, and scarcely directed his eyes to Estella’s face once during dinner. When she spoke to him, he listened, and in due course answered, but never looked at her, that I could see. On the other hand, she often looked at him, with interest and curiosity, if not distrust, but his face never showed the least consciousness. Throughout dinner he took a dry delight in making Sarah Pocket greener and yellower, by often referring in conversation with me to my expectations; but here, again, he showed no consciousness, and even made it appear that he extorted—and even did extort, though I don’t know how—those references out of my innocent self.

And when he and I were left alone together, he sat with an air upon him of general lying by in consequence of information he possessed, that really was too much for me. He cross-examined his very wine when he had nothing else in hand. He held it between himself and the candle, tasted the port, rolled it in his mouth, swallowed it, looked at his glass again, smelt the port, tried it, drank it, filled again, and cross-examined the glass again, until I was as nervous as if I had known the wine to be telling him something to my disadvantage. Three or four times I feebly thought I would start conversation; but whenever he saw me going to ask him anything, he looked at me with his glass in his hand, and rolling his wine about in his mouth, as if requesting me to take notice that it was of no use, for he couldn’t answer.

I think Miss Pocket was conscious that the sight of me involved her in the danger of being goaded to madness, and perhaps tearing off her cap,—which was a very hideous one, in the nature of a muslin mop,—and strewing the ground with her hair,—which assuredly had never grown on

her head. She did not appear when we afterwards went up to Miss Havisham's room, and we four played at whist. In the interval, Miss Havisham, in a fantastic way, had put some of the most beautiful jewels from her dressing-table into Estella's hair, and about her bosom and arms; and I saw even my guardian look at her from under his thick eyebrows, and raise them a little, when her loveliness was before him, with those rich flushes of glitter and color in it.

Of the manner and extent to which he took our trumps into custody, and came out with mean little cards at the ends of hands, before which the glory of our Kings and Queens was utterly abased, I say nothing; nor, of the feeling that I had, respecting his looking upon us personally in the light of three very obvious and poor riddles that he had found out long ago. What I suffered from, was the incompatibility between his cold presence and my feelings towards Estella. It was not that I knew I could never bear to speak to him about her, that I knew I could never bear to hear him creak his boots at her, that I knew I could never bear to see him wash his hands of her; it was, that my admiration should be within a foot or two of him,—it was, that my feelings should be in the same place with him,—that, was the agonizing circumstance.

We played until nine o'clock, and then it was arranged that when Estella came to London I should be forewarned of her coming and should meet her at the coach; and then I took leave of her, and touched her and left her.

My guardian lay at the Boar in the next room to mine. Far into the night, Miss Havisham's words, "Love her, love her, love her!" sounded in my ears. I adapted them for my own repetition, and said to my pillow, "I love her, I love her, I love her!" hundreds of times. Then, a burst of gratitude came upon me, that she should be destined for me, once the blacksmith's boy. Then I thought if she were, as I feared, by no means rapturously grateful for that destiny yet, when would she begin to be interested in me? When should I awaken the heart within her that was mute and sleeping now?

Ah me! I thought those were high and great emotions. But I never thought there was anything low and small in my keeping away from Joe, because I knew she would be contemptuous of him. It was but a day gone, and Joe had brought the tears into my eyes; they had soon dried, God

forgive me! soon dried.

Chapter XXX

AFTER WELL CONSIDERING THE matter while I was dressing at the Blue Boar in the morning, I resolved to tell my guardian that I doubted Orlick's being the right sort of man to fill a post of trust at Miss Havisham's. "Why of course he is not the right sort of man, Pip," said my guardian, comfortably satisfied beforehand on the general head, "because the man who fills the post of trust never is the right sort of man." It seemed quite to put him into spirits to find that this particular post was not exceptionally held by the right sort of man, and he listened in a satisfied manner while I told him what knowledge I had of Orlick. "Very good, Pip," he observed, when I had concluded, "I'll go round presently, and pay our friend off." Rather alarmed by this summary action, I was for a little delay, and even hinted that our friend himself might be difficult to deal with. "Oh no he won't," said my guardian, making his pocket-handkerchief-point, with perfect confidence; "I should like to see him argue the question with me."

As we were going back together to London by the midday coach, and as I breakfasted under such terrors of Pumblechook that I could scarcely hold my cup, this gave me an opportunity of saying that I wanted a walk, and that I would go on along the London road while Mr. Jaggers was occupied, if he would let the coachman know that I would get into my place when overtaken. I was thus enabled to fly from the Blue Boar immediately after breakfast. By then making a loop of about a couple of miles into the open country at the back of Pumblechook's premises, I got round into the High Street again, a little beyond that pitfall, and felt myself in comparative security.

It was interesting to be in the quiet old town once more, and it was not disagreeable to be here and there suddenly recognized and stared after. One or two of the tradespeople even darted out of their shops and went a little

way down the street before me, that they might turn, as if they had forgotten something, and pass me face to face,—on which occasions I don't know whether they or I made the worse pretence; they of not doing it, or I of not seeing it. Still my position was a distinguished one, and I was not at all dissatisfied with it, until Fate threw me in the way of that unlimited miscreant, Trabb's boy.

Casting my eyes along the street at a certain point of my progress, I beheld Trabb's boy approaching, lashing himself with an empty blue bag. Deeming that a serene and unconscious contemplation of him would best beseem me, and would be most likely to quell his evil mind, I advanced with that expression of countenance, and was rather congratulating myself on my success, when suddenly the knees of Trabb's boy smote together, his hair uprose, his cap fell off, he trembled violently in every limb, staggered out into the road, and crying to the populace, "Hold me! I'm so frightened!" feigned to be in a paroxysm of terror and contrition, occasioned by the dignity of my appearance. As I passed him, his teeth loudly chattered in his head, and with every mark of extreme humiliation, he prostrated himself in the dust.

This was a hard thing to bear, but this was nothing. I had not advanced another two hundred yards when, to my inexpressible terror, amazement, and indignation, I again beheld Trabb's boy approaching. He was coming round a narrow corner. His blue bag was slung over his shoulder, honest industry beamed in his eyes, a determination to proceed to Trabb's with cheerful briskness was indicated in his gait. With a shock he became aware of me, and was severely visited as before; but this time his motion was rotatory, and he staggered round and round me with knees more afflicted, and with uplifted hands as if beseeching for mercy. His sufferings were hailed with the greatest joy by a knot of spectators, and I felt utterly confounded.

I had not got as much further down the street as the post-office, when I again beheld Trabb's boy shooting round by a back way. This time, he was entirely changed. He wore the blue bag in the manner of my great-coat, and was strutting along the pavement towards me on the opposite side of the street, attended by a company of delighted young friends to whom he from time to time exclaimed, with a wave of his hand, "Don't know yah!" Words cannot state the amount of aggravation and injury wreaked upon me by

Trabb's boy, when passing abreast of me, he pulled up his shirt-collar, twined his side-hair, stuck an arm akimbo, and smirked extravagantly by, wriggling his elbows and body, and drawling to his attendants, "Don't know yah, don't know yah, 'pon my soul don't know yah!" The disgrace attendant on his immediately afterwards taking to crowing and pursuing me across the bridge with crows, as from an exceedingly dejected fowl who had known me when I was a blacksmith, culminated the disgrace with which I left the town, and was, so to speak, ejected by it into the open country.

But unless I had taken the life of Trabb's boy on that occasion, I really do not even now see what I could have done save endure. To have struggled with him in the street, or to have exacted any lower recompense from him than his heart's best blood, would have been futile and degrading. Moreover, he was a boy whom no man could hurt; an invulnerable and dodging serpent who, when chased into a corner, flew out again between his captor's legs, scornfully yelping. I wrote, however, to Mr. Trabb by next day's post, to say that Mr. Pip must decline to deal further with one who could so far forget what he owed to the best interests of society, as to employ a boy who excited Loathing in every respectable mind.

The coach, with Mr. Jaggers inside, came up in due time, and I took my box-seat again, and arrived in London safe,—but not sound, for my heart was gone. As soon as I arrived, I sent a penitential codfish and barrel of oysters to Joe (as reparation for not having gone myself), and then went on to Barnard's Inn.

I found Herbert dining on cold meat, and delighted to welcome me back. Having despatched The Avenger to the coffee-house for an addition to the dinner, I felt that I must open my breast that very evening to my friend and chum. As confidence was out of the question with The Avenger in the hall, which could merely be regarded in the light of an antechamber to the keyhole, I sent him to the Play. A better proof of the severity of my bondage to that taskmaster could scarcely be afforded, than the degrading shifts to which I was constantly driven to find him employment. So mean is extremity, that I sometimes sent him to Hyde Park corner to see what o'clock it was.

Dinner done and we sitting with our feet upon the fender, I said to Herbert, "My dear Herbert, I have something very particular to tell you."

“My dear Handel,” he returned, “I shall esteem and respect your confidence.”

“It concerns myself, Herbert,” said I, “and one other person.”

Herbert crossed his feet, looked at the fire with his head on one side, and having looked at it in vain for some time, looked at me because I didn’t go on.

“Herbert,” said I, laying my hand upon his knee, “I love—I adore—Estella.”

Instead of being transfixed, Herbert replied in an easy matter-of-course way, “Exactly. Well?”

“Well, Herbert? Is that all you say? Well?”

“What next, I mean?” said Herbert. “Of course I know that.”

“How do you know it?” said I.

“How do I know it, Handel? Why, from you.”

“I never told you.”

“Told me! You have never told me when you have got your hair cut, but I have had senses to perceive it. You have always adored her, ever since I have known you. You brought your adoration and your portmanteau here together. Told me! Why, you have always told me all day long. When you told me your own story, you told me plainly that you began adoring her the first time you saw her, when you were very young indeed.”

“Very well, then,” said I, to whom this was a new and not unwelcome light, “I have never left off adoring her. And she has come back, a most beautiful and most elegant creature. And I saw her yesterday. And if I adored her before, I now doubly adore her.”

“Lucky for you then, Handel,” said Herbert, “that you are picked out for her and allotted to her. Without encroaching on forbidden ground, we may venture to say that there can be no doubt between ourselves of that fact. Have you any idea yet, of Estella’s views on the adoration question?”

I shook my head gloomily. “Oh! She is thousands of miles away, from me,” said I.

“Patience, my dear Handel: time enough, time enough. But you have something more to say?”

“I am ashamed to say it,” I returned, “and yet it’s no worse to say it than to think it. You call me a lucky fellow. Of course, I am. I was a blacksmith’s boy but yesterday; I am—what shall I say I am—to-day?”

“Say a good fellow, if you want a phrase,” returned Herbert, smiling, and clapping his hand on the back of mine—“a good fellow, with impetuosity and hesitation, boldness and diffidence, action and dreaming, curiously mixed in him.”

I stopped for a moment to consider whether there really was this mixture in my character. On the whole, I by no means recognized the analysis, but thought it not worth disputing.

“When I ask what I am to call myself to-day, Herbert,” I went on, “I suggest what I have in my thoughts. You say I am lucky. I know I have done nothing to raise myself in life, and that Fortune alone has raised me; that is being very lucky. And yet, when I think of Estella—”

(“And when don’t you, you know?” Herbert threw in, with his eyes on the fire; which I thought kind and sympathetic of him.)

“—Then, my dear Herbert, I cannot tell you how dependent and uncertain I feel, and how exposed to hundreds of chances. Avoiding forbidden ground, as you did just now, I may still say that on the constancy of one person (naming no person) all my expectations depend. And at the best, how indefinite and unsatisfactory, only to know so vaguely what they are!” In saying this, I relieved my mind of what had always been there, more or less, though no doubt most since yesterday.

“Now, Handel,” Herbert replied, in his gay, hopeful way, “it seems to me that in the despondency of the tender passion, we are looking into our gift-horse’s mouth with a magnifying-glass. Likewise, it seems to me that, concentrating our attention on the examination, we altogether overlook one of the best points of the animal. Didn’t you tell me that your guardian, Mr. Jaggers, told you in the beginning, that you were not endowed with expectations only? And even if he had not told you so,—though that is a very large If, I grant,—could you believe that of all men in London, Mr. Jaggers is the man to hold his present relations towards you unless he were sure of his ground?”

I said I could not deny that this was a strong point. I said it (people often do so, in such cases) like a rather reluctant concession to truth and justice; —as if I wanted to deny it!

“I should think it was a strong point,” said Herbert, “and I should think you would be puzzled to imagine a stronger; as to the rest, you must bide your guardian’s time, and he must bide his client’s time. You’ll be one-and-

twenty before you know where you are, and then perhaps you'll get some further enlightenment. At all events, you'll be nearer getting it, for it must come at last."

"What a hopeful disposition you have!" said I, gratefully admiring his cheery ways.

"I ought to have," said Herbert, "for I have not much else. I must acknowledge, by the by, that the good sense of what I have just said is not my own, but my father's. The only remark I ever heard him make on your story, was the final one, 'The thing is settled and done, or Mr. Jaggers would not be in it.' And now before I say anything more about my father, or my father's son, and repay confidence with confidence, I want to make myself seriously disagreeable to you for a moment,—positively repulsive."

"You won't succeed," said I.

"O yes I shall!" said he. "One, two, three, and now I am in for it. Handel, my good fellow;"—though he spoke in this light tone, he was very much in earnest,—"I have been thinking since we have been talking with our feet on this fender, that Estella surely cannot be a condition of your inheritance, if she was never referred to by your guardian. Am I right in so understanding what you have told me, as that he never referred to her, directly or indirectly, in any way? Never even hinted, for instance, that your patron might have views as to your marriage ultimately?"

"Never."

"Now, Handel, I am quite free from the flavor of sour grapes, upon my soul and honor! Not being bound to her, can you not detach yourself from her?—I told you I should be disagreeable."

I turned my head aside, for, with a rush and a sweep, like the old marsh winds coming up from the sea, a feeling like that which had subdued me on the morning when I left the forge, when the mists were solemnly rising, and when I laid my hand upon the village finger-post, smote upon my heart again. There was silence between us for a little while.

"Yes; but my dear Handel," Herbert went on, as if we had been talking, instead of silent, "its having been so strongly rooted in the breast of a boy whom nature and circumstances made so romantic, renders it very serious. Think of her bringing-up, and think of Miss Havisham. Think of what she is herself (now I am repulsive and you abominate me). This may lead to miserable things."

“I know it, Herbert,” said I, with my head still turned away, “but I can’t help it.”

“You can’t detach yourself?”

“No. Impossible!”

“You can’t try, Handel?”

“No. Impossible!”

“Well!” said Herbert, getting up with a lively shake as if he had been asleep, and stirring the fire, “now I’ll endeavor to make myself agreeable again!”

So he went round the room and shook the curtains out, put the chairs in their places, tidied the books and so forth that were lying about, looked into the hall, peeped into the letter-box, shut the door, and came back to his chair by the fire: where he sat down, nursing his left leg in both arms.

“I was going to say a word or two, Handel, concerning my father and my father’s son. I am afraid it is scarcely necessary for my father’s son to remark that my father’s establishment is not particularly brilliant in its housekeeping.”

“There is always plenty, Herbert,” said I, to say something encouraging.

“O yes! and so the dustman says, I believe, with the strongest approval, and so does the marine-store shop in the back street. Gravely, Handel, for the subject is grave enough, you know how it is as well as I do. I suppose there was a time once when my father had not given matters up; but if ever there was, the time is gone. May I ask you if you have ever had an opportunity of remarking, down in your part of the country, that the children of not exactly suitable marriages are always most particularly anxious to be married?”

This was such a singular question, that I asked him in return, “Is it so?”

“I don’t know,” said Herbert, “that’s what I want to know. Because it is decidedly the case with us. My poor sister Charlotte, who was next me and died before she was fourteen, was a striking example. Little Jane is the same. In her desire to be matrimonially established, you might suppose her to have passed her short existence in the perpetual contemplation of domestic bliss. Little Alick in a frock has already made arrangements for his union with a suitable young person at Kew. And indeed, I think we are all engaged, except the baby.”

“Then you are?” said I.

“I am,” said Herbert; “but it’s a secret.”

I assured him of my keeping the secret, and begged to be favored with further particulars. He had spoken so sensibly and feelingly of my weakness that I wanted to know something about his strength.

“May I ask the name?” I said.

“Name of Clara,” said Herbert.

“Live in London?”

“Yes, perhaps I ought to mention,” said Herbert, who had become curiously crestfallen and meek, since we entered on the interesting theme, “that she is rather below my mother’s nonsensical family notions. Her father had to do with the victualling of passenger-ships. I think he was a species of purser.”

“What is he now?” said I.

“He’s an invalid now,” replied Herbert.

“Living on—?”

“On the first floor,” said Herbert. Which was not at all what I meant, for I had intended my question to apply to his means. “I have never seen him, for he has always kept his room overhead, since I have known Clara. But I have heard him constantly. He makes tremendous rows,—roars, and pegs at the floor with some frightful instrument.” In looking at me and then laughing heartily, Herbert for the time recovered his usual lively manner.

“Don’t you expect to see him?” said I.

“O yes, I constantly expect to see him,” returned Herbert, “because I never hear him, without expecting him to come tumbling through the ceiling. But I don’t know how long the rafters may hold.”

When he had once more laughed heartily, he became meek again, and told me that the moment he began to realize Capital, it was his intention to marry this young lady. He added as a self-evident proposition, engendering low spirits, “But you can’t marry, you know, while you’re looking about you.”

As we contemplated the fire, and as I thought what a difficult vision to realize this same Capital sometimes was, I put my hands in my pockets. A folded piece of paper in one of them attracting my attention, I opened it and found it to be the play-bill I had received from Joe, relative to the celebrated provincial amateur of Roscian renown. “And bless my heart,” I involuntarily added aloud, “it’s to-night!”

This changed the subject in an instant, and made us hurriedly resolve to go to the play. So, when I had pledged myself to comfort and abet Herbert in the affair of his heart by all practicable and impracticable means, and when Herbert had told me that his affianced already knew me by reputation and that I should be presented to her, and when we had warmly shaken hands upon our mutual confidence, we blew out our candles, made up our fire, locked our door, and issued forth in quest of Mr. Wopsle and Denmark.

Chapter XXXI

ON OUR ARRIVAL IN Denmark, we found the king and queen of that country elevated in two arm-chairs on a kitchen-table, holding a Court. The whole of the Danish nobility were in attendance; consisting of a noble boy in the wash-leather boots of a gigantic ancestor, a venerable Peer with a dirty face who seemed to have risen from the people late in life, and the Danish chivalry with a comb in its hair and a pair of white silk legs, and presenting on the whole a feminine appearance. My gifted townsman stood gloomily apart, with folded arms, and I could have wished that his curls and forehead had been more probable.

Several curious little circumstances transpired as the action proceeded. The late king of the country not only appeared to have been troubled with a cough at the time of his decease, but to have taken it with him to the tomb, and to have brought it back. The royal phantom also carried a ghostly manuscript round its truncheon, to which it had the appearance of occasionally referring, and that too, with an air of anxiety and a tendency to lose the place of reference which were suggestive of a state of mortality. It was this, I conceive, which led to the Shade's being advised by the gallery to "turn over!"—a recommendation which it took extremely ill. It was likewise to be noted of this majestic spirit, that whereas it always appeared with an air of having been out a long time and walked an immense distance, it perceptibly came from a closely contiguous wall. This occasioned its terrors to be received derisively. The Queen of Denmark, a very buxom lady, though no doubt historically brazen, was considered by the public to have too much brass about her; her chin being attached to her diadem by a broad band of that metal (as if she had a gorgeous toothache), her waist being encircled by another, and each of her arms by another, so that she was openly mentioned as "the kettle-drum." The noble boy in the ancestral

boots was inconsistent, representing himself, as it were in one breath, as an able seaman, a strolling actor, a grave-digger, a clergyman, and a person of the utmost importance at a Court fencing-match, on the authority of whose practised eye and nice discrimination the finest strokes were judged. This gradually led to a want of toleration for him, and even—on his being detected in holy orders, and declining to perform the funeral service—to the general indignation taking the form of nuts. Lastly, Ophelia was a prey to such slow musical madness, that when, in course of time, she had taken off her white muslin scarf, folded it up, and buried it, a sulky man who had been long cooling his impatient nose against an iron bar in the front row of the gallery, growled, “Now the baby’s put to bed let’s have supper!” Which, to say the least of it, was out of keeping.

Upon my unfortunate townsman all these incidents accumulated with playful effect. Whenever that undecided Prince had to ask a question or state a doubt, the public helped him out with it. As for example; on the question whether ’twas nobler in the mind to suffer, some roared yes, and some no, and some inclining to both opinions said “Toss up for it;” and quite a Debating Society arose. When he asked what should such fellows as he do crawling between earth and heaven, he was encouraged with loud cries of “Hear, hear!” When he appeared with his stocking disordered (its disorder expressed, according to usage, by one very neat fold in the top, which I suppose to be always got up with a flat iron), a conversation took place in the gallery respecting the paleness of his leg, and whether it was occasioned by the turn the ghost had given him. On his taking the recorders, —very like a little black flute that had just been played in the orchestra and handed out at the door,—he was called upon unanimously for Rule Britannia. When he recommended the player not to saw the air thus, the sulky man said, “And don’t you do it, neither; you’re a deal worse than him!” And I grieve to add that peals of laughter greeted Mr. Wopsle on every one of these occasions.

But his greatest trials were in the churchyard, which had the appearance of a primeval forest, with a kind of small ecclesiastical wash-house on one side, and a turnpike gate on the other. Mr. Wopsle in a comprehensive black cloak, being descried entering at the turnpike, the gravedigger was admonished in a friendly way, “Look out! Here’s the undertaker a coming, to see how you’re a getting on with your work!” I believe it is well known

in a constitutional country that Mr. Wopsle could not possibly have returned the skull, after moralizing over it, without dusting his fingers on a white napkin taken from his breast; but even that innocent and indispensable action did not pass without the comment, “Wai-ter!” The arrival of the body for interment (in an empty black box with the lid tumbling open), was the signal for a general joy, which was much enhanced by the discovery, among the bearers, of an individual obnoxious to identification. The joy attended Mr. Wopsle through his struggle with Laertes on the brink of the orchestra and the grave, and slackened no more until he had tumbled the king off the kitchen-table, and had died by inches from the ankles upward.

We had made some pale efforts in the beginning to applaud Mr. Wopsle; but they were too hopeless to be persisted in. Therefore we had sat, feeling keenly for him, but laughing, nevertheless, from ear to ear. I laughed in spite of myself all the time, the whole thing was so droll; and yet I had a latent impression that there was something decidedly fine in Mr. Wopsle’s elocution,—not for old associations’ sake, I am afraid, but because it was very slow, very dreary, very up-hill and down-hill, and very unlike any way in which any man in any natural circumstances of life or death ever expressed himself about anything. When the tragedy was over, and he had been called for and hooted, I said to Herbert, “Let us go at once, or perhaps we shall meet him.”

We made all the haste we could down stairs, but we were not quick enough either. Standing at the door was a Jewish man with an unnatural heavy smear of eyebrow, who caught my eyes as we advanced, and said, when we came up with him,—

“Mr. Pip and friend?”

Identity of Mr. Pip and friend confessed.

“Mr. Waldengarver,” said the man, “would be glad to have the honor.”

“Waldengarver?” I repeated—when Herbert murmured in my ear, “Probably Wopsle.”

“Oh!” said I. “Yes. Shall we follow you?”

“A few steps, please.” When we were in a side alley, he turned and asked, “How did you think he looked?—I dressed him.”

I don’t know what he had looked like, except a funeral; with the addition of a large Danish sun or star hanging round his neck by a blue ribbon, that had given him the appearance of being insured in some extraordinary Fire

Office. But I said he had looked very nice.

"When he come to the grave," said our conductor, "he showed his cloak beautiful. But, judging from the wing, it looked to me that when he see the ghost in the queen's apartment, he might have made more of his stockings."

I modestly assented, and we all fell through a little dirty swing door, into a sort of hot packing-case immediately behind it. Here Mr. Wopsle was divesting himself of his Danish garments, and here there was just room for us to look at him over one another's shoulders, by keeping the packing-case door, or lid, wide open.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Wopsle, "I am proud to see you. I hope, Mr. Pip, you will excuse my sending round. I had the happiness to know you in former times, and the Drama has ever had a claim which has ever been acknowledged, on the noble and the affluent."

Meanwhile, Mr. Waldengarver, in a frightful perspiration, was trying to get himself out of his princely sables.

"Skin the stockings off Mr. Waldengarver," said the owner of that property, "or you'll bust 'em. Bust 'em, and you'll bust five-and-thirty shillings. Shakspeare never was complimented with a finer pair. Keep quiet in your chair now, and leave 'em to me."

With that, he went upon his knees, and began to flay his victim; who, on the first stocking coming off, would certainly have fallen over backward with his chair, but for there being no room to fall anyhow.

I had been afraid until then to say a word about the play. But then, Mr. Waldengarver looked up at us complacently, and said,—

"Gentlemen, how did it seem to you, to go, in front?"

Herbert said from behind (at the same time poking me), "Capitally." So I said "Capitally."

"How did you like my reading of the character, gentlemen?" said Mr. Waldengarver, almost, if not quite, with patronage.

Herbert said from behind (again poking me), "Massive and concrete." So I said boldly, as if I had originated it, and must beg to insist upon it, "Massive and concrete."

"I am glad to have your approbation, gentlemen," said Mr. Waldengarver, with an air of dignity, in spite of his being ground against the wall at the time, and holding on by the seat of the chair.

"But I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Waldengarver," said the man who was

on his knees, “in which you’re out in your reading. Now mind! I don’t care who says contrairy; I tell you so. You’re out in your reading of Hamlet when you get your legs in profile. The last Hamlet as I dressed, made the same mistakes in his reading at rehearsal, till I got him to put a large red wafer on each of his shins, and then at that rehearsal (which was the last) I went in front, sir, to the back of the pit, and whenever his reading brought him into profile, I called out ‘I don’t see no wafers!’ And at night his reading was lovely.”

Mr. Waldengarver smiled at me, as much as to say “a faithful Dependent —I overlook his folly;” and then said aloud, “My view is a little classic and thoughtful for them here; but they will improve, they will improve.”

Herbert and I said together, O, no doubt they would improve.

“Did you observe, gentlemen,” said Mr. Waldengarver, “that there was a man in the gallery who endeavored to cast derision on the service,—I mean, the representation?”

We basely replied that we rather thought we had noticed such a man. I added, “He was drunk, no doubt.”

“O dear no, sir,” said Mr. Wopsle, “not drunk. His employer would see to that, sir. His employer would not allow him to be drunk.”

“You know his employer?” said I.

Mr. Wopsle shut his eyes, and opened them again; performing both ceremonies very slowly. “You must have observed, gentlemen,” said he, “an ignorant and a blatant ass, with a rasping throat and a countenance expressive of low malignity, who went through—I will not say sustained—the rôle (if I may use a French expression) of Claudius, King of Denmark. That is his employer, gentlemen. Such is the profession!”

Without distinctly knowing whether I should have been more sorry for Mr. Wopsle if he had been in despair, I was so sorry for him as it was, that I took the opportunity of his turning round to have his braces put on,—which jostled us out at the doorway,—to ask Herbert what he thought of having him home to supper? Herbert said he thought it would be kind to do so; therefore I invited him, and he went to Barnard’s with us, wrapped up to the eyes, and we did our best for him, and he sat until two o’clock in the morning, reviewing his success and developing his plans. I forget in detail what they were, but I have a general recollection that he was to begin with reviving the Drama, and to end with crushing it; inasmuch as his decease

would leave it utterly bereft and without a chance or hope.

Miserably I went to bed after all, and miserably thought of Estella, and miserably dreamed that my expectations were all cancelled, and that I had to give my hand in marriage to Herbert’s Clara, or play Hamlet to Miss Havisham’s Ghost, before twenty thousand people, without knowing twenty words of it.

Chapter XXXII

ONE DAY WHEN I was busy with my books and Mr. Pocket, I received a note by the post, the mere outside of which threw me into a great flutter; for, though I had never seen the handwriting in which it was addressed, I divined whose hand it was. It had no set beginning, as Dear Mr. Pip, or Dear Pip, or Dear Sir, or Dear Anything, but ran thus:—

"I am to come to London the day after to-morrow by the midday coach. I believe it was settled you should meet me? At all events Miss Havisham has that impression, and I write in obedience to it. She sends you her regard.

"Yours, ESTELLA."

If there had been time, I should probably have ordered several suits of clothes for this occasion; but as there was not, I was fain to be content with those I had. My appetite vanished instantly, and I knew no peace or rest until the day arrived. Not that its arrival brought me either; for, then I was worse than ever, and began haunting the coach-office in Wood Street, Cheapside, before the coach had left the Blue Boar in our town. For all that I knew this perfectly well, I still felt as if it were not safe to let the coach-office be out of my sight longer than five minutes at a time; and in this condition of unreason I had performed the first half-hour of a watch of four or five hours, when Wemmick ran against me.

"Halloa, Mr. Pip," said he; "how do you do? I should hardly have thought this was your beat."

I explained that I was waiting to meet somebody who was coming up by coach, and I inquired after the Castle and the Aged.

"Both flourishing thankye," said Wemmick, "and particularly the Aged. He's in wonderful feather. He'll be eighty-two next birthday. I have a notion of firing eighty-two times, if the neighborhood shouldn't complain, and that cannon of mine should prove equal to the pressure. However, this is not

London talk. Where do you think I am going to?”

“To the office?” said I, for he was tending in that direction.

“Next thing to it,” returned Wemmick, “I am going to Newgate. We are in a banker’s-parcel case just at present, and I have been down the road taking a squint at the scene of action, and thereupon must have a word or two with our client.”

“Did your client commit the robbery?” I asked.

“Bless your soul and body, no,” answered Wemmick, very drily. “But he is accused of it. So might you or I be. Either of us might be accused of it, you know.”

“Only neither of us is,” I remarked.

“Yah!” said Wemmick, touching me on the breast with his forefinger; “you’re a deep one, Mr. Pip! Would you like to have a look at Newgate? Have you time to spare?”

I had so much time to spare, that the proposal came as a relief, notwithstanding its irreconcilability with my latent desire to keep my eye on the coach-office. Muttering that I would make the inquiry whether I had time to walk with him, I went into the office, and ascertained from the clerk with the nicest precision and much to the trying of his temper, the earliest moment at which the coach could be expected,—which I knew beforehand, quite as well as he. I then rejoined Mr. Wemmick, and affecting to consult my watch, and to be surprised by the information I had received, accepted his offer.

We were at Newgate in a few minutes, and we passed through the lodge where some fetters were hanging up on the bare walls among the prison rules, into the interior of the jail. At that time jails were much neglected, and the period of exaggerated reaction consequent on all public wrongdoing —and which is always its heaviest and longest punishment—was still far off. So felons were not lodged and fed better than soldiers, (to say nothing of paupers,) and seldom set fire to their prisons with the excusable object of improving the flavor of their soup. It was visiting time when Wemmick took me in, and a potman was going his rounds with beer; and the prisoners, behind bars in yards, were buying beer, and talking to friends; and a frowzy, ugly, disorderly, depressing scene it was.

It struck me that Wemmick walked among the prisoners much as a gardener might walk among his plants. This was first put into my head by

his seeing a shoot that had come up in the night, and saying, “What, Captain Tom? Are you there? Ah, indeed!” and also, “Is that Black Bill behind the cistern? Why I didn’t look for you these two months; how do you find yourself?” Equally in his stopping at the bars and attending to anxious whisperers,—always singly,—Wemmick with his post-office in an immovable state, looked at them while in conference, as if he were taking particular notice of the advance they had made, since last observed, towards coming out in full blow at their trial.

He was highly popular, and I found that he took the familiar department of Mr. Jaggers’s business; though something of the state of Mr. Jaggers hung about him too, forbidding approach beyond certain limits. His personal recognition of each successive client was comprised in a nod, and in his settling his hat a little easier on his head with both hands, and then tightening the post-office, and putting his hands in his pockets. In one or two instances there was a difficulty respecting the raising of fees, and then Mr. Wemmick, backing as far as possible from the insufficient money produced, said, “it’s no use, my boy. I’m only a subordinate. I can’t take it. Don’t go on in that way with a subordinate. If you are unable to make up your quantum, my boy, you had better address yourself to a principal; there are plenty of principals in the profession, you know, and what is not worth the while of one, may be worth the while of another; that’s my recommendation to you, speaking as a subordinate. Don’t try on useless measures. Why should you? Now, who’s next?”

Thus, we walked through Wemmick’s greenhouse, until he turned to me and said, “Notice the man I shall shake hands with.” I should have done so, without the preparation, as he had shaken hands with no one yet.

Almost as soon as he had spoken, a portly upright man (whom I can see now, as I write) in a well-worn olive-colored frock-coat, with a peculiar pallor overspreading the red in his complexion, and eyes that went wandering about when he tried to fix them, came up to a corner of the bars, and put his hand to his hat—which had a greasy and fatty surface like cold broth—with a half-serious and half-jocose military salute.

“Colonel, to you!” said Wemmick; “how are you, Colonel?”

“All right, Mr. Wemmick.”

“Everything was done that could be done, but the evidence was too strong for us, Colonel.”

“Yes, it was too strong, sir,—but I don’t care.”

“No, no,” said Wemmick, coolly, “you don’t care.” Then, turning to me, “Served His Majesty this man. Was a soldier in the line and bought his discharge.”

I said, “Indeed?” and the man’s eyes looked at me, and then looked over my head, and then looked all round me, and then he drew his hand across his lips and laughed.

“I think I shall be out of this on Monday, sir,” he said to Wemmick.

“Perhaps,” returned my friend, “but there’s no knowing.”

“I am glad to have the chance of bidding you good by, Mr. Wemmick,” said the man, stretching out his hand between two bars.

“Thankye,” said Wemmick, shaking hands with him. “Same to you, Colonel.”

“If what I had upon me when taken had been real, Mr. Wemmick,” said the man, unwilling to let his hand go, “I should have asked the favor of your wearing another ring—in acknowledgment of your attentions.”

“I’ll accept the will for the deed,” said Wemmick. “By the by; you were quite a pigeon-fancier.” The man looked up at the sky. “I am told you had a remarkable breed of tumblers. Could you commission any friend of yours to bring me a pair, of you’ve no further use for ’em?”

“It shall be done, sir?”

“All right,” said Wemmick, “they shall be taken care of. Good afternoon, Colonel. Good by!” They shook hands again, and as we walked away Wemmick said to me, “A Coiner, a very good workman. The Recorder’s report is made to-day, and he is sure to be executed on Monday. Still you see, as far as it goes, a pair of pigeons are portable property all the same.” With that, he looked back, and nodded at this dead plant, and then cast his eyes about him in walking out of the yard, as if he were considering what other pot would go best in its place.

As we came out of the prison through the lodge, I found that the great importance of my guardian was appreciated by the turnkeys, no less than by those whom they held in charge. “Well, Mr. Wemmick,” said the turnkey, who kept us between the two studded and spiked lodge gates, and who carefully locked one before he unlocked the other, “what’s Mr. Jaggers going to do with that water-side murder? Is he going to make it manslaughter, or what’s he going to make of it?”

“Why don’t you ask him?” returned Wemmick.

“O yes, I dare say!” said the turnkey.

“Now, that’s the way with them here, Mr. Pip,” remarked Wemmick, turning to me with his post-office elongated. “They don’t mind what they ask of me, the subordinate; but you’ll never catch ’em asking any questions of my principal.”

“Is this young gentleman one of the ’prentices or articled ones of your office?” asked the turnkey, with a grin at Mr. Wemmick’s humor.

“There he goes again, you see!” cried Wemmick, “I told you so! Asks another question of the subordinate before his first is dry! Well, supposing Mr. Pip is one of them?”

“Why then,” said the turnkey, grinning again, “he knows what Mr. Jaggers is.”

“Yah!” cried Wemmick, suddenly hitting out at the turnkey in a facetious way, “you’re dumb as one of your own keys when you have to do with my principal, you know you are. Let us out, you old fox, or I’ll get him to bring an action against you for false imprisonment.”

The turnkey laughed, and gave us good day, and stood laughing at us over the spikes of the wicket when we descended the steps into the street.

“Mind you, Mr. Pip,” said Wemmick, gravely in my ear, as he took my arm to be more confidential; “I don’t know that Mr. Jaggers does a better thing than the way in which he keeps himself so high. He’s always so high. His constant height is of a piece with his immense abilities. That Colonel durst no more take leave of him, than that turnkey durst ask him his intentions respecting a case. Then, between his height and them, he slips in his subordinate,—don’t you see?—and so he has ’em, soul and body.”

I was very much impressed, and not for the first time, by my guardian’s subtlety. To confess the truth, I very heartily wished, and not for the first time, that I had had some other guardian of minor abilities.

Mr. Wemmick and I parted at the office in Little Britain, where suppliants for Mr. Jaggers’s notice were lingering about as usual, and I returned to my watch in the street of the coach-office, with some three hours on hand. I consumed the whole time in thinking how strange it was that I should be encompassed by all this taint of prison and crime; that, in my childhood out on our lonely marshes on a winter evening, I should have first encountered it; that, it should have reappeared on two occasions,

starting out like a stain that was faded but not gone; that, it should in this new way pervade my fortune and advancement. While my mind was thus engaged, I thought of the beautiful young Estella, proud and refined, coming towards me, and I thought with absolute abhorrence of the contrast between the jail and her. I wished that Wemmick had not met me, or that I had not yielded to him and gone with him, so that, of all days in the year on this day, I might not have had Newgate in my breath and on my clothes. I beat the prison dust off my feet as I sauntered to and fro, and I shook it out of my dress, and I exhaled its air from my lungs. So contaminated did I feel, remembering who was coming, that the coach came quickly after all, and I was not yet free from the soiling consciousness of Mr. Wemmick's conservatory, when I saw her face at the coach window and her hand waving to me.

What was the nameless shadow which again in that one instant had passed?

Chapter XXXIII

IN HER FURRED TRAVELLING-DRESS, Estella seemed more delicately beautiful than she had ever seemed yet, even in my eyes. Her manner was more winning than she had cared to let it be to me before, and I thought I saw Miss Havisham's influence in the change.

We stood in the Inn Yard while she pointed out her luggage to me, and when it was all collected I remembered—having forgotten everything but herself in the meanwhile—that I knew nothing of her destination.

"I am going to Richmond," she told me. "Our lesson is, that there are two Richmonds, one in Surrey and one in Yorkshire, and that mine is the Surrey Richmond. The distance is ten miles. I am to have a carriage, and you are to take me. This is my purse, and you are to pay my charges out of it. O, you must take the purse! We have no choice, you and I, but to obey our instructions. We are not free to follow our own devices, you and I."

As she looked at me in giving me the purse, I hoped there was an inner meaning in her words. She said them slightingly, but not with displeasure.

"A carriage will have to be sent for, Estella. Will you rest here a little?"

"Yes, I am to rest here a little, and I am to drink some tea, and you are to take care of me the while."

She drew her arm through mine, as if it must be done, and I requested a waiter who had been staring at the coach like a man who had never seen such a thing in his life, to show us a private sitting-room. Upon that, he pulled out a napkin, as if it were a magic clew without which he couldn't find the way up stairs, and led us to the black hole of the establishment, fitted up with a diminishing mirror (quite a superfluous article, considering the hole's proportions), an anchovy sauce-cruet, and somebody's pattens. On my objecting to this retreat, he took us into another room with a dinner-table for thirty, and in the grate a scorched leaf of a copy-book under a

bushel of coal-dust. Having looked at this extinct conflagration and shaken his head, he took my order; which, proving to be merely, “Some tea for the lady,” sent him out of the room in a very low state of mind.

I was, and I am, sensible that the air of this chamber, in its strong combination of stable with soup-stock, might have led one to infer that the coaching department was not doing well, and that the enterprising proprietor was boiling down the horses for the refreshment department. Yet the room was all in all to me, Estella being in it. I thought that with her I could have been happy there for life. (I was not at all happy there at the time, observe, and I knew it well.)

“Where are you going to, at Richmond?” I asked Estella.

“I am going to live,” said she, “at a great expense, with a lady there, who has the power—or says she has—of taking me about, and introducing me, and showing people to me and showing me to people.”

“I suppose you will be glad of variety and admiration?”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

She answered so carelessly, that I said, “You speak of yourself as if you were some one else.”

“Where did you learn how I speak of others? Come, come,” said Estella, smiling delightfully, “you must not expect me to go to school to you; I must talk in my own way. How do you thrive with Mr. Pocket?”

“I live quite pleasantly there; at least—” It appeared to me that I was losing a chance.

“At least?” repeated Estella.

“As pleasantly as I could anywhere, away from you.”

“You silly boy,” said Estella, quite composedly, “how can you talk such nonsense? Your friend Mr. Matthew, I believe, is superior to the rest of his family?”

“Very superior indeed. He is nobody’s enemy—”

“—Don’t add but his own,” interposed Estella, “for I hate that class of man. But he really is disinterested, and above small jealousy and spite, I have heard?”

“I am sure I have every reason to say so.”

“You have not every reason to say so of the rest of his people,” said Estella, nodding at me with an expression of face that was at once grave and rallying, “for they beset Miss Havisham with reports and insinuations to

your disadvantage. They watch you, misrepresent you, write letters about you (anonymous sometimes), and you are the torment and the occupation of their lives. You can scarcely realize to yourself the hatred those people feel for you."

"They do me no harm, I hope?"

Instead of answering, Estella burst out laughing. This was very singular to me, and I looked at her in considerable perplexity. When she left off—and she had not laughed languidly, but with real enjoyment—I said, in my diffident way with her,—

"I hope I may suppose that you would not be amused if they did me any harm."

"No, no you may be sure of that," said Estella. "You may be certain that I laugh because they fail. O, those people with Miss Havisham, and the tortures they undergo!" She laughed again, and even now when she had told me why, her laughter was very singular to me, for I could not doubt its being genuine, and yet it seemed too much for the occasion. I thought there must really be something more here than I knew; she saw the thought in my mind, and answered it.

"It is not easy for even you." said Estella, "to know what satisfaction it gives me to see those people thwarted, or what an enjoyable sense of the ridiculous I have when they are made ridiculous. For you were not brought up in that strange house from a mere baby. I was. You had not your little wits sharpened by their intriguing against you, suppressed and defenceless, under the mask of sympathy and pity and what not that is soft and soothing. I had. You did not gradually open your round childish eyes wider and wider to the discovery of that impostor of a woman who calculates her stores of peace of mind for when she wakes up in the night. I did."

It was no laughing matter with Estella now, nor was she summoning these remembrances from any shallow place. I would not have been the cause of that look of hers for all my expectations in a heap.

"Two things I can tell you," said Estella. "First, notwithstanding the proverb that constant dropping will wear away a stone, you may set your mind at rest that these people never will—never would, in hundred years—impair your ground with Miss Havisham, in any particular, great or small. Second, I am beholden to you as the cause of their being so busy and so mean in vain, and there is my hand upon it."

As she gave it to me playfully,—for her darker mood had been but Momentary,—I held it and put it to my lips. “You ridiculous boy,” said Estella, “will you never take warning? Or do you kiss my hand in the same spirit in which I once let you kiss my cheek?”

“What spirit was that?” said I.

“I must think a moment. A spirit of contempt for the fawners and plotters.”

“If I say yes, may I kiss the cheek again?”

“You should have asked before you touched the hand. But, yes, if you like.”

I leaned down, and her calm face was like a statue’s. “Now,” said Estella, gliding away the instant I touched her cheek, “you are to take care that I have some tea, and you are to take me to Richmond.”

Her reverting to this tone as if our association were forced upon us, and we were mere puppets, gave me pain; but everything in our intercourse did give me pain. Whatever her tone with me happened to be, I could put no trust in it, and build no hope on it; and yet I went on against trust and against hope. Why repeat it a thousand times? So it always was.

I rang for the tea, and the waiter, reappearing with his magic clew, brought in by degrees some fifty adjuncts to that refreshment, but of tea not a glimpse. A teaboard, cups and saucers, plates, knives and forks (including carvers), spoons (various), saltcellars, a meek little muffin confined with the utmost precaution under a strong iron cover, Moses in the bulrushes typified by a soft bit of butter in a quantity of parsley, a pale loaf with a powdered head, two proof impressions of the bars of the kitchen fireplace on triangular bits of bread, and ultimately a fat family urn; which the waiter staggered in with, expressing in his countenance burden and suffering. After a prolonged absence at this stage of the entertainment, he at length came back with a casket of precious appearance containing twigs. These I steeped in hot water, and so from the whole of these appliances extracted one cup of I don’t know what for Estella.

The bill paid, and the waiter remembered, and the ostler not forgotten, and the chambermaid taken into consideration,—in a word, the whole house bribed into a state of contempt and animosity, and Estella’s purse much lightened,—we got into our post-coach and drove away. Turning into Cheapside and rattling up Newgate Street, we were soon under the walls of

which I was so ashamed.

“What place is that?” Estella asked me.

I made a foolish pretence of not at first recognizing it, and then told her. As she looked at it, and drew in her head again, murmuring, “Wretches!” I would not have confessed to my visit for any consideration.

“Mr. Jaggers,” said I, by way of putting it neatly on somebody else, “has the reputation of being more in the secrets of that dismal place than any man in London.”

“He is more in the secrets of every place, I think,” said Estella, in a low voice.

“You have been accustomed to see him often, I suppose?”

“I have been accustomed to see him at uncertain intervals, ever since I can remember. But I know him no better now, than I did before I could speak plainly. What is your own experience of him? Do you advance with him?”

“Once habituated to his distrustful manner,” said I, “I have done very well.”

“Are you intimate?”

“I have dined with him at his private house.”

“I fancy,” said Estella, shrinking, “that must be a curious place.”

“It is a curious place.”

I should have been chary of discussing my guardian too freely even with her; but I should have gone on with the subject so far as to describe the dinner in Gerrard Street, if we had not then come into a sudden glare of gas. It seemed, while it lasted, to be all alight and alive with that inexplicable feeling I had had before; and when we were out of it, I was as much dazed for a few moments as if I had been in lightning.

So we fell into other talk, and it was principally about the way by which we were travelling, and about what parts of London lay on this side of it, and what on that. The great city was almost new to her, she told me, for she had never left Miss Havisham’s neighborhood until she had gone to France, and she had merely passed through London then in going and returning. I asked her if my guardian had any charge of her while she remained here? To that she emphatically said “God forbid!” and no more.

It was impossible for me to avoid seeing that she cared to attract me; that she made herself winning, and would have won me even if the task had

needed pains. Yet this made me none the happier, for even if she had not taken that tone of our being disposed of by others, I should have felt that she held my heart in her hand because she wilfully chose to do it, and not because it would have wrung any tenderness in her to crush it and throw it away.

When we passed through Hammersmith, I showed her where Mr. Matthew Pocket lived, and said it was no great way from Richmond, and that I hoped I should see her sometimes.

“O yes, you are to see me; you are to come when you think proper; you are to be mentioned to the family; indeed you are already mentioned.”

I inquired was it a large household she was going to be a member of?

“No; there are only two; mother and daughter. The mother is a lady of some station, though not averse to increasing her income.”

“I wonder Miss Havisham could part with you again so soon.”

“It is a part of Miss Havisham’s plans for me, Pip,” said Estella, with a sigh, as if she were tired; “I am to write to her constantly and see her regularly and report how I go on,—I and the jewels,—for they are nearly all mine now.”

It was the first time she had ever called me by my name. Of course she did so purposely, and knew that I should treasure it up.

We came to Richmond all too soon, and our destination there was a house by the green,—a staid old house, where hoops and powder and patches, embroidered coats, rolled stockings, ruffles and swords, had had their court days many a time. Some ancient trees before the house were still cut into fashions as formal and unnatural as the hoops and wigs and stiff skirts; but their own allotted places in the great procession of the dead were not far off, and they would soon drop into them and go the silent way of the rest.

A bell with an old voice—which I dare say in its time had often said to the house, Here is the green farthingale, Here is the diamond-hilted sword, Here are the shoes with red heels and the blue solitaire—sounded gravely in the moonlight, and two cherry-colored maids came fluttering out to receive Estella. The doorway soon absorbed her boxes, and she gave me her hand and a smile, and said good night, and was absorbed likewise. And still I stood looking at the house, thinking how happy I should be if I lived there with her, and knowing that I never was happy with her, but always

miserable.

I got into the carriage to be taken back to Hammersmith, and I got in with a bad heart-ache, and I got out with a worse heart-ache. At our own door, I found little Jane Pocket coming home from a little party escorted by her little lover; and I envied her little lover, in spite of his being subject to Flopson.

Mr. Pocket was out lecturing; for, he was a most delightful lecturer on domestic economy, and his treatises on the management of children and servants were considered the very best text-books on those themes. But Mrs. Pocket was at home, and was in a little difficulty, on account of the baby's having been accommodated with a needle-case to keep him quiet during the unaccountable absence (with a relative in the Foot Guards) of Millers. And more needles were missing than it could be regarded as quite wholesome for a patient of such tender years either to apply externally or to take as a tonic.

Mr. Pocket being justly celebrated for giving most excellent practical advice, and for having a clear and sound perception of things and a highly judicious mind, I had some notion in my heart-ache of begging him to accept my confidence. But happening to look up at Mrs. Pocket as she sat reading her book of dignities after prescribing Bed as a sovereign remedy for baby, I thought—Well—No, I wouldn't.

Chapter XXXIV

AS I HAD GROWN accustomed to my expectations, I had insensibly begun to notice their effect upon myself and those around me. Their influence on my own character I disguised from my recognition as much as possible, but I knew very well that it was not all good. I lived in a state of chronic uneasiness respecting my behavior to Joe. My conscience was not by any means comfortable about Biddy. When I woke up in the night,—like Camilla,—I used to think, with a weariness on my spirits, that I should have been happier and better if I had never seen Miss Havisham's face, and had risen to manhood content to be partners with Joe in the honest old forge. Many a time of an evening, when I sat alone looking at the fire, I thought, after all there was no fire like the forge fire and the kitchen fire at home.

Yet Estella was so inseparable from all my restlessness and disquiet of mind, that I really fell into confusion as to the limits of my own part in its production. That is to say, supposing I had had no expectations, and yet had had Estella to think of, I could not make out to my satisfaction that I should have done much better. Now, concerning the influence of my position on others, I was in no such difficulty, and so I perceived—though dimly enough perhaps—that it was not beneficial to anybody, and, above all, that it was not beneficial to Herbert. My lavish habits led his easy nature into expenses that he could not afford, corrupted the simplicity of his life, and disturbed his peace with anxieties and regrets. I was not at all remorseful for having unwittingly set those other branches of the Pocket family to the poor arts they practised; because such littlenesses were their natural bent, and would have been evoked by anybody else, if I had left them slumbering. But Herbert's was a very different case, and it often caused me a twinge to think that I had done him evil service in crowding his sparely furnished chambers with incongruous upholstery work, and placing the

Canary-breasted Avenger at his disposal.

So now, as an infallible way of making little ease great ease, I began to contract a quantity of debt. I could hardly begin but Herbert must begin too, so he soon followed. At Startop's suggestion, we put ourselves down for election into a club called The Finches of the Grove: the object of which institution I have never divined, if it were not that the members should dine expensively once a fortnight, to quarrel among themselves as much as possible after dinner, and to cause six waiters to get drunk on the stairs. I know that these gratifying social ends were so invariably accomplished, that Herbert and I understood nothing else to be referred to in the first standing toast of the society: which ran "Gentlemen, may the present promotion of good feeling ever reign predominant among the Finches of the Grove."

The Finches spent their money foolishly (the Hotel we dined at was in Covent Garden), and the first Finch I saw when I had the honor of joining the Grove was Bentley Drummle, at that time floundering about town in a cab of his own, and doing a great deal of damage to the posts at the street corners. Occasionally, he shot himself out of his equipage headforemost over the apron; and I saw him on one occasion deliver himself at the door of the Grove in this unintentional way—like coals. But here I anticipate a little, for I was not a Finch, and could not be, according to the sacred laws of the society, until I came of age.

In my confidence in my own resources, I would willingly have taken Herbert's expenses on myself; but Herbert was proud, and I could make no such proposal to him. So he got into difficulties in every direction, and continued to look about him. When we gradually fell into keeping late hours and late company, I noticed that he looked about him with a desponding eye at breakfast-time; that he began to look about him more hopefully about mid-day; that he drooped when he came into dinner; that he seemed to descry Capital in the distance, rather clearly, after dinner; that he all but realized Capital towards midnight; and that at about two o'clock in the morning, he became so deeply despondent again as to talk of buying a rifle and going to America, with a general purpose of compelling buffaloes to make his fortune.

I was usually at Hammersmith about half the week, and when I was at Hammersmith I haunted Richmond, whereof separately by and by. Herbert would often come to Hammersmith when I was there, and I think at those

seasons his father would occasionally have some passing perception that the opening he was looking for, had not appeared yet. But in the general tumbling up of the family, his tumbling out in life somewhere, was a thing to transact itself somehow. In the meantime Mr. Pocket grew grayer, and tried oftener to lift himself out of his perplexities by the hair. While Mrs. Pocket tripped up the family with her footstool, read her book of dignities, lost her pocket-handkerchief, told us about her grandpapa, and taught the young idea how to shoot, by shooting it into bed whenever it attracted her notice.

As I am now generalizing a period of my life with the object of clearing my way before me, I can scarcely do so better than by at once completing the description of our usual manners and customs at Barnard's Inn.

We spent as much money as we could, and got as little for it as people could make up their minds to give us. We were always more or less miserable, and most of our acquaintance were in the same condition. There was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did. To the best of my belief, our case was in the last aspect a rather common one.

Every morning, with an air ever new, Herbert went into the City to look about him. I often paid him a visit in the dark back-room in which he consorted with an ink-jar, a hat-peg, a coal-box, a string-box, an almanac, a desk and stool, and a ruler; and I do not remember that I ever saw him do anything else but look about him. If we all did what we undertake to do, as faithfully as Herbert did, we might live in a Republic of the Virtues. He had nothing else to do, poor fellow, except at a certain hour of every afternoon to "go to Lloyd's"—in observance of a ceremony of seeing his principal, I think. He never did anything else in connection with Lloyd's that I could find out, except come back again. When he felt his case unusually serious, and that he positively must find an opening, he would go on 'Change at a busy time, and walk in and out, in a kind of gloomy country dance figure, among the assembled magnates. "For," says Herbert to me, coming home to dinner on one of those special occasions, "I find the truth to be, Handel, that an opening won't come to one, but one must go to it,—so I have been."

If we had been less attached to one another, I think we must have hated one another regularly every morning. I detested the chambers beyond expression at that period of repentance, and could not endure the sight of

the Avenger's livery; which had a more expensive and a less remunerative appearance then than at any other time in the four-and-twenty hours. As we got more and more into debt, breakfast became a hollower and hollower form, and, being on one occasion at breakfast-time threatened (by letter) with legal proceedings, "not unwholly unconnected," as my local paper might put it, "with jewelery," I went so far as to seize the Avenger by his blue collar and shake him off his feet,—so that he was actually in the air, like a booted Cupid,—for presuming to suppose that we wanted a roll.

At certain times—meaning at uncertain times, for they depended on our humor—I would say to Herbert, as if it were a remarkable discovery,—

"My dear Herbert, we are getting on badly."

"My dear Handel," Herbert would say to me, in all sincerity, "if you will believe me, those very words were on my lips, by a strange coincidence."

"Then, Herbert," I would respond, "let us look into our affairs."

We always derived profound satisfaction from making an appointment for this purpose. I always thought this was business, this was the way to confront the thing, this was the way to take the foe by the throat. And I know Herbert thought so too.

We ordered something rather special for dinner, with a bottle of something similarly out of the common way, in order that our minds might be fortified for the occasion, and we might come well up to the mark. Dinner over, we produced a bundle of pens, a copious supply of ink, and a goodly show of writing and blotting paper. For there was something very comfortable in having plenty of stationery.

I would then take a sheet of paper, and write across the top of it, in a neat hand, the heading, "Memorandum of Pip's debts"; with Barnard's Inn and the date very carefully added. Herbert would also take a sheet of paper, and write across it with similar formalities, "Memorandum of Herbert's debts."

Each of us would then refer to a confused heap of papers at his side, which had been thrown into drawers, worn into holes in pockets, half burnt in lighting candles, stuck for weeks into the looking-glass, and otherwise damaged. The sound of our pens going refreshed us exceedingly, insomuch that I sometimes found it difficult to distinguish between this edifying business proceeding and actually paying the money. In point of meritorious character, the two things seemed about equal.

When we had written a little while, I would ask Herbert how he got on?

Herbert probably would have been scratching his head in a most rueful manner at the sight of his accumulating figures.

“They are mounting up, Handel,” Herbert would say; “upon my life, they are mounting up.”

“Be firm, Herbert,” I would retort, plying my own pen with great assiduity. “Look the thing in the face. Look into your affairs. Stare them out of countenance.”

“So I would, Handel, only they are staring me out of countenance.”

However, my determined manner would have its effect, and Herbert would fall to work again. After a time he would give up once more, on the plea that he had not got Cobbs’s bill, or Lobbs’s, or Nobbs’s, as the case might be.

“Then, Herbert, estimate; estimate it in round numbers, and put it down.”

“What a fellow of resource you are!” my friend would reply, with admiration. “Really your business powers are very remarkable.”

I thought so too. I established with myself, on these occasions, the reputation of a first-rate man of business,—prompt, decisive, energetic, clear, cool-headed. When I had got all my responsibilities down upon my list, I compared each with the bill, and ticked it off. My self-approval when I ticked an entry was quite a luxurious sensation. When I had no more ticks to make, I folded all my bills up uniformly, docketed each on the back, and tied the whole into a symmetrical bundle. Then I did the same for Herbert (who modestly said he had not my administrative genius), and felt that I had brought his affairs into a focus for him.

My business habits had one other bright feature, which I called “leaving a Margin.” For example; supposing Herbert’s debts to be one hundred and sixty-four pounds four-and-twopence, I would say, “Leave a margin, and put them down at two hundred.” Or, supposing my own to be four times as much, I would leave a margin, and put them down at seven hundred. I had the highest opinion of the wisdom of this same Margin, but I am bound to acknowledge that on looking back, I deem it to have been an expensive device. For, we always ran into new debt immediately, to the full extent of the margin, and sometimes, in the sense of freedom and solvency it imparted, got pretty far on into another margin.

But there was a calm, a rest, a virtuous hush, consequent on these examinations of our affairs that gave me, for the time, an admirable opinion

of myself. Soothed by my exertions, my method, and Herbert's compliments, I would sit with his symmetrical bundle and my own on the table before me among the stationary, and feel like a Bank of some sort, rather than a private individual.

We shut our outer door on these solemn occasions, in order that we might not be interrupted. I had fallen into my serene state one evening, when we heard a letter dropped through the slit in the said door, and fall on the ground. "It's for you, Handel," said Herbert, going out and coming back with it, "and I hope there is nothing the matter." This was in allusion to its heavy black seal and border.

The letter was signed Trabb & Co., and its contents were simply, that I was an honored sir, and that they begged to inform me that Mrs. J. Gargery had departed this life on Monday last at twenty minutes past six in the evening, and that my attendance was requested at the interment on Monday next at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Chapter XXXV

IT WAS THE FIRST time that a grave had opened in my road of life, and the gap it made in the smooth ground was wonderful. The figure of my sister in her chair by the kitchen fire, haunted me night and day. That the place could possibly be, without her, was something my mind seemed unable to compass; and whereas she had seldom or never been in my thoughts of late, I had now the strangest ideas that she was coming towards me in the street, or that she would presently knock at the door. In my rooms too, with which she had never been at all associated, there was at once the blankness of death and a perpetual suggestion of the sound of her voice or the turn of her face or figure, as if she were still alive and had been often there.

Whatever my fortunes might have been, I could scarcely have recalled my sister with much tenderness. But I suppose there is a shock of regret which may exist without much tenderness. Under its influence (and perhaps to make up for the want of the softer feeling) I was seized with a violent indignation against the assailant from whom she had suffered so much; and I felt that on sufficient proof I could have revengefully pursued Orlick, or any one else, to the last extremity.

Having written to Joe, to offer him consolation, and to assure him that I would come to the funeral, I passed the intermediate days in the curious state of mind I have glanced at. I went down early in the morning, and alighted at the Blue Boar in good time to walk over to the forge.

It was fine summer weather again, and, as I walked along, the times when I was a little helpless creature, and my sister did not spare me, vividly returned. But they returned with a gentle tone upon them that softened even the edge of Tickler. For now, the very breath of the beans and clover whispered to my heart that the day must come when it would be well for my memory that others walking in the sunshine should be softened as they

thought of me.

At last I came within sight of the house, and saw that Trabb and Co. had put in a funereal execution and taken possession. Two dismally absurd persons, each ostentatiously exhibiting a crutch done up in a black bandage, —as if that instrument could possibly communicate any comfort to anybody,—were posted at the front door; and in one of them I recognized a postboy discharged from the Boar for turning a young couple into a sawpit on their bridal morning, in consequence of intoxication rendering it necessary for him to ride his horse clasped round the neck with both arms. All the children of the village, and most of the women, were admiring these sable warders and the closed windows of the house and forge; and as I came up, one of the two warders (the postboy) knocked at the door,—implying that I was far too much exhausted by grief to have strength remaining to knock for myself.

Another sable warder (a carpenter, who had once eaten two geese for a wager) opened the door, and showed me into the best parlor. Here, Mr. Trabb had taken unto himself the best table, and had got all the leaves up, and was holding a kind of black Bazaar, with the aid of a quantity of black pins. At the moment of my arrival, he had just finished putting somebody's hat into black long-clothes, like an African baby; so he held out his hand for mine. But I, misled by the action, and confused by the occasion, shook hands with him with every testimony of warm affection.

Poor dear Joe, entangled in a little black cloak tied in a large bow under his chin, was seated apart at the upper end of the room; where, as chief mourner, he had evidently been stationed by Trabb. When I bent down and said to him, "Dear Joe, how are you?" he said, "Pip, old chap, you knowed her when she were a fine figure of a—" and clasped my hand and said no more.

Biddy, looking very neat and modest in her black dress, went quietly here and there, and was very helpful. When I had spoken to Biddy, as I thought it not a time for talking I went and sat down near Joe, and there began to wonder in what part of the house it—she—my sister—was. The air of the parlor being faint with the smell of sweet-cake, I looked about for the table of refreshments; it was scarcely visible until one had got accustomed to the gloom, but there was a cut-up plum cake upon it, and there were cut-up oranges, and sandwiches, and biscuits, and two decanters that I knew

very well as ornaments, but had never seen used in all my life; one full of port, and one of sherry. Standing at this table, I became conscious of the servile Pumblechook in a black cloak and several yards of hatband, who was alternately stuffing himself, and making obsequious movements to catch my attention. The moment he succeeded, he came over to me (breathing sherry and crumbs), and said in a subdued voice, “May I, dear sir?” and did. I then descried Mr. and Mrs. Hubble; the last-named in a decent speechless paroxysm in a corner. We were all going to “follow,” and were all in course of being tied up separately (by Trabb) into ridiculous bundles.

“Which I meantersay, Pip,” Joe whispered me, as we were being what Mr. Trabb called “formed” in the parlor, two and two,—and it was dreadfully like a preparation for some grim kind of dance; “which I meantersay, sir, as I would in preference have carried her to the church myself, along with three or four friendly ones wot come to it with willing harts and arms, but it were considered wot the neighbors would look down on such and would be of opinions as it were wanting in respect.”

“Pocket-handkerchiefs out, all!” cried Mr. Trabb at this point, in a depressed business-like voice. “Pocket-handkerchiefs out! We are ready!”

So we all put our pocket-handkerchiefs to our faces, as if our noses were bleeding, and filed out two and two; Joe and I; Biddy and Pumblechook; Mr. and Mrs. Hubble. The remains of my poor sister had been brought round by the kitchen door, and, it being a point of Undertaking ceremony that the six bearers must be stifled and blinded under a horrible black velvet housing with a white border, the whole looked like a blind monster with twelve human legs, shuffling and blundering along, under the guidance of two keepers,—the postboy and his comrade.

The neighborhood, however, highly approved of these arrangements, and we were much admired as we went through the village; the more youthful and vigorous part of the community making dashes now and then to cut us off, and lying in wait to intercept us at points of vantage. At such times the more exuberant among them called out in an excited manner on our emergence round some corner of expectancy, “Here they come!” “Here they are!” and we were all but cheered. In this progress I was much annoyed by the abject Pumblechook, who, being behind me, persisted all the way as a delicate attention in arranging my streaming hatband, and smoothing my

cloak. My thoughts were further distracted by the excessive pride of Mr. and Mrs. Hubble, who were surpassingly conceited and vainglorious in being members of so distinguished a procession.

And now the range of marshes lay clear before us, with the sails of the ships on the river growing out of it; and we went into the churchyard, close to the graves of my unknown parents, Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and Also Georgiana, Wife of the Above. And there, my sister was laid quietly in the earth, while the larks sang high above it, and the light wind strewed it with beautiful shadows of clouds and trees.

Of the conduct of the worldly minded Pumblechook while this was doing, I desire to say no more than it was all addressed to me; and that even when those noble passages were read which remind humanity how it brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out, and how it fleeth like a shadow and never continueth long in one stay, I heard him cough a reservation of the case of a young gentleman who came unexpectedly into large property. When we got back, he had the hardihood to tell me that he wished my sister could have known I had done her so much honor, and to hint that she would have considered it reasonably purchased at the price of her death. After that, he drank all the rest of the sherry, and Mr. Hubble drank the port, and the two talked (which I have since observed to be customary in such cases) as if they were of quite another race from the deceased, and were notoriously immortal. Finally, he went away with Mr. and Mrs. Hubble,—to make an evening of it, I felt sure, and to tell the Jolly Bargemen that he was the founder of my fortunes and my earliest benefactor.

When they were all gone, and when Trabb and his men—but not his Boy; I looked for him—had crammed their mummery into bags, and were gone too, the house felt wholesomer. Soon afterwards, Biddy, Joe, and I, had a cold dinner together; but we dined in the best parlor, not in the old kitchen, and Joe was so exceedingly particular what he did with his knife and fork and the saltcellar and what not, that there was great restraint upon us. But after dinner, when I made him take his pipe, and when I had loitered with him about the forge, and when we sat down together on the great block of stone outside it, we got on better. I noticed that after the funeral Joe changed his clothes so far, as to make a compromise between his Sunday dress and working dress; in which the dear fellow looked natural, and like

the Man he was.

He was very much pleased by my asking if I might sleep in my own little room, and I was pleased too; for I felt that I had done rather a great thing in making the request. When the shadows of evening were closing in, I took an opportunity of getting into the garden with Biddy for a little talk.

“Biddy,” said I, “I think you might have written to me about these sad matters.”

“Do you, Mr. Pip?” said Biddy. “I should have written if I had thought that.”

“Don’t suppose that I mean to be unkind, Biddy, when I say I consider that you ought to have thought that.”

“Do you, Mr. Pip?”

She was so quiet, and had such an orderly, good, and pretty way with her, that I did not like the thought of making her cry again. After looking a little at her downcast eyes as she walked beside me, I gave up that point.

“I suppose it will be difficult for you to remain here now, Biddy dear?”

“Oh! I can’t do so, Mr. Pip,” said Biddy, in a tone of regret but still of quiet conviction. “I have been speaking to Mrs. Hubble, and I am going to her to-morrow. I hope we shall be able to take some care of Mr. Gargery, together, until he settles down.”

“How are you going to live, Biddy? If you want any mo—”

“How am I going to live?” repeated Biddy, striking in, with a momentary flush upon her face. “I’ll tell you, Mr. Pip. I am going to try to get the place of mistress in the new school nearly finished here. I can be well recommended by all the neighbors, and I hope I can be industrious and patient, and teach myself while I teach others. You know, Mr. Pip,” pursued Biddy, with a smile, as she raised her eyes to my face, “the new schools are not like the old, but I learnt a good deal from you after that time, and have had time since then to improve.”

“I think you would always improve, Biddy, under any circumstances.”

“Ah! Except in my bad side of human nature,” murmured Biddy.

It was not so much a reproach as an irresistible thinking aloud. Well! I thought I would give up that point too. So, I walked a little further with Biddy, looking silently at her downcast eyes.

“I have not heard the particulars of my sister’s death, Biddy.”

“They are very slight, poor thing. She had been in one of her bad states

—though they had got better of late, rather than worse—for four days, when she came out of it in the evening, just at tea-time, and said quite plainly, ‘Joe.’ As she had never said any word for a long while, I ran and fetched in Mr. Gargery from the forge. She made signs to me that she wanted him to sit down close to her, and wanted me to put her arms round his neck. So I put them round his neck, and she laid her head down on his shoulder quite content and satisfied. And so she presently said ‘Joe’ again, and once ‘Pardon,’ and once ‘Pip.’ And so she never lifted her head up any more, and it was just an hour later when we laid it down on her own bed, because we found she was gone.”

Biddy cried; the darkening garden, and the lane, and the stars that were coming out, were blurred in my own sight.

“Nothing was ever discovered, Biddy?”

“Nothing.”

“Do you know what is become of Orlick?”

“I should think from the color of his clothes that he is working in the quarries.”

“Of course you have seen him then?— Why are you looking at that dark tree in the lane?”

“I saw him there, on the night she died.”

“That was not the last time either, Biddy?”

“No; I have seen him there, since we have been walking here.— It is of no use,” said Biddy, laying her hand upon my arm, as I was for running out, “you know I would not deceive you; he was not there a minute, and he is gone.”

It revived my utmost indignation to find that she was still pursued by this fellow, and I felt inveterate against him. I told her so, and told her that I would spend any money or take any pains to drive him out of that country. By degrees she led me into more temperate talk, and she told me how Joe loved me, and how Joe never complained of anything,—she didn’t say, of me; she had no need; I knew what she meant,—but ever did his duty in his way of life, with a strong hand, a quiet tongue, and a gentle heart.

“Indeed, it would be hard to say too much for him,” said I; “and Biddy, we must often speak of these things, for of course I shall be often down here now. I am not going to leave poor Joe alone.”

Biddy said never a single word.

“Biddy, don’t you hear me?”

“Yes, Mr. Pip.”

“Not to mention your calling me Mr. Pip,—which appears to me to be in bad taste, Biddy,—what do you mean?”

“What do I mean?” asked Biddy, timidly.

“Biddy,” said I, in a virtuously self-asserting manner, “I must request to know what you mean by this?”

“By this?” said Biddy.

“Now, don’t echo,” I retorted. “You used not to echo, Biddy.”

“Used not!” said Biddy. “O Mr. Pip! Used!”

Well! I rather thought I would give up that point too. After another silent turn in the garden, I fell back on the main position.

“Biddy,” said I, “I made a remark respecting my coming down here often, to see Joe, which you received with a marked silence. Have the goodness, Biddy, to tell me why.”

“Are you quite sure, then, that you *will* come to see him often?” asked Biddy, stopping in the narrow garden walk, and looking at me under the stars with a clear and honest eye.

“O dear me!” said I, as if I found myself compelled to give up Biddy in despair. “This really is a very bad side of human nature! Don’t say any more, if you please, Biddy. This shocks me very much.”

For which cogent reason I kept Biddy at a distance during supper, and when I went up to my own old little room, took as stately a leave of her as I could, in my murmuring soul, deem reconcilable with the churchyard and the event of the day. As often as I was restless in the night, and that was every quarter of an hour, I reflected what an unkindness, what an injury, what an injustice, Biddy had done me.

Early in the morning I was to go. Early in the morning I was out, and looking in, unseen, at one of the wooden windows of the forge. There I stood, for minutes, looking at Joe, already at work with a glow of health and strength upon his face that made it show as if the bright sun of the life in store for him were shining on it.

“Good by, dear Joe!— No, don’t wipe it off—for God’s sake, give me your blackened hand!— I shall be down soon and often.”

“Never too soon, sir,” said Joe, “and never too often, Pip!”

Biddy was waiting for me at the kitchen door, with a mug of new milk

and a crust of bread. “Biddy,” said I, when I gave her my hand at parting, “I am not angry, but I am hurt.”

“No, don’t be hurt,” she pleaded quite pathetically; “let only me be hurt, if I have been ungenerous.”

Once more, the mists were rising as I walked away. If they disclosed to me, as I suspect they did, that I should not come back, and that Biddy was quite right, all I can say is,—they were quite right too.

Chapter XXXVI

HERBERT AND I WENT on from bad to worse, in the way of increasing our debts, looking into our affairs, leaving Margins, and the like exemplary transactions; and Time went on, whether or no, as he has a way of doing; and I came of age,—in fulfilment of Herbert's prediction, that I should do so before I knew where I was.

Herbert himself had come of age eight months before me. As he had nothing else than his majority to come into, the event did not make a profound sensation in Barnard's Inn. But we had looked forward to my one-and-twentieth birthday, with a crowd of speculations and anticipations, for we had both considered that my guardian could hardly help saying something definite on that occasion.

I had taken care to have it well understood in Little Britain when my birthday was. On the day before it, I received an official note from Wemmick, informing me that Mr. Jaggers would be glad if I would call upon him at five in the afternoon of the auspicious day. This convinced us that something great was to happen, and threw me into an unusual flutter when I repaired to my guardian's office, a model of punctuality.

In the outer office Wemmick offered me his congratulations, and incidentally rubbed the side of his nose with a folded piece of tissue-paper that I liked the look of. But he said nothing respecting it, and motioned me with a nod into my guardian's room. It was November, and my guardian was standing before his fire leaning his back against the chimney-piece, with his hands under his coattails.

"Well, Pip," said he, "I must call you Mr. Pip to-day. Congratulations, Mr. Pip."

We shook hands,—he was always a remarkably short shaker,—and I thanked him.

“Take a chair, Mr. Pip,” said my guardian.

As I sat down, and he preserved his attitude and bent his brows at his boots, I felt at a disadvantage, which reminded me of that old time when I had been put upon a tombstone. The two ghastly casts on the shelf were not far from him, and their expression was as if they were making a stupid apoplectic attempt to attend to the conversation.

“Now my young friend,” my guardian began, as if I were a witness in the box, “I am going to have a word or two with you.”

“If you please, sir.”

“What do you suppose,” said Mr. Jaggers, bending forward to look at the ground, and then throwing his head back to look at the ceiling,—“what do you suppose you are living at the rate of?”

“At the rate of, sir?”

“At,” repeated Mr. Jaggers, still looking at the ceiling, “the—rate—of?” And then looked all round the room, and paused with his pocket-handkerchief in his hand, half-way to his nose.

I had looked into my affairs so often, that I had thoroughly destroyed any slight notion I might ever have had of their bearings. Reluctantly, I confessed myself quite unable to answer the question. This reply seemed agreeable to Mr. Jaggers, who said, “I thought so!” and blew his nose with an air of satisfaction.

“Now, I have asked you a question, my friend,” said Mr. Jaggers. “Have you anything to ask me?”

“Of course it would be a great relief to me to ask you several questions, sir; but I remember your prohibition.”

“Ask one,” said Mr. Jaggers.

“Is my benefactor to be made known to me to-day?”

“No. Ask another.”

“Is that confidence to be imparted to me soon?”

“Waive that, a moment,” said Mr. Jaggers, “and ask another.”

I looked about me, but there appeared to be now no possible escape from the inquiry, “Have—I—anything to receive, sir?” On that, Mr. Jaggers said, triumphantly, “I thought we should come to it!” and called to Wemmick to give him that piece of paper. Wemmick appeared, handed it in, and disappeared.

“Now, Mr. Pip,” said Mr. Jaggers, “attend, if you please. You have been

drawing pretty freely here; your name occurs pretty often in Wemmick's cash-book; but you are in debt, of course?"

"I am afraid I must say yes, sir."

"You know you must say yes; don't you?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Yes, sir."

"I don't ask you what you owe, because you don't know; and if you did know, you wouldn't tell me; you would say less. Yes, yes, my friend," cried Mr. Jaggers, waving his forefinger to stop me as I made a show of protesting: "it's likely enough that you think you wouldn't, but you would. You'll excuse me, but I know better than you. Now, take this piece of paper in your hand. You have got it? Very good. Now, unfold it and tell me what it is."

"This is a bank-note," said I, "for five hundred pounds."

"That is a bank-note," repeated Mr. Jaggers, "for five hundred pounds. And a very handsome sum of money too, I think. You consider it so?"

"How could I do otherwise!"

"Ah! But answer the question," said Mr. Jaggers.

"Undoubtedly."

"You consider it, undoubtedly, a handsome sum of money. Now, that handsome sum of money, Pip, is your own. It is a present to you on this day, in earnest of your expectations. And at the rate of that handsome sum of money per annum, and at no higher rate, you are to live until the donor of the whole appears. That is to say, you will now take your money affairs entirely into your own hands, and you will draw from Wemmick one hundred and twenty-five pounds per quarter, until you are in communication with the fountain-head, and no longer with the mere agent. As I have told you before, I am the mere agent. I execute my instructions, and I am paid for doing so. I think them injudicious, but I am not paid for giving any opinion on their merits."

I was beginning to express my gratitude to my benefactor for the great liberality with which I was treated, when Mr. Jaggers stopped me. "I am not paid, Pip," said he, coolly, "to carry your words to any one;" and then gathered up his coat-tails, as he had gathered up the subject, and stood frowning at his boots as if he suspected them of designs against him.

After a pause, I hinted,—

"There was a question just now, Mr. Jaggers, which you desired me to

waive for a moment. I hope I am doing nothing wrong in asking it again?”

“What is it?” said he.

I might have known that he would never help me out; but it took me aback to have to shape the question afresh, as if it were quite new. “Is it likely,” I said, after hesitating, “that my patron, the fountain-head you have spoken of, Mr. Jaggers, will soon—” there I delicately stopped.

“Will soon what?” asked Mr. Jaggers. “That’s no question as it stands, you know.”

“Will soon come to London,” said I, after casting about for a precise form of words, “or summon me anywhere else?”

“Now, here,” replied Mr. Jaggers, fixing me for the first time with his dark deep-set eyes, “we must revert to the evening when we first encountered one another in your village. What did I tell you then, Pip?”

“You told me, Mr. Jaggers, that it might be years hence when that person appeared.”

“Just so,” said Mr. Jaggers, “that’s my answer.”

As we looked full at one another, I felt my breath come quicker in my strong desire to get something out of him. And as I felt that it came quicker, and as I felt that he saw that it came quicker, I felt that I had less chance than ever of getting anything out of him.

“Do you suppose it will still be years hence, Mr. Jaggers?”

Mr. Jaggers shook his head,—not in negativing the question, but in altogether negativing the notion that he could anyhow be got to answer it,—and the two horrible casts of the twitched faces looked, when my eyes strayed up to them, as if they had come to a crisis in their suspended attention, and were going to sneeze.

“Come!” said Mr. Jaggers, warming the backs of his legs with the backs of his warmed hands, “I’ll be plain with you, my friend Pip. That’s a question I must not be asked. You’ll understand that better, when I tell you it’s a question that might compromise me. Come! I’ll go a little further with you; I’ll say something more.”

He bent down so low to frown at his boots, that he was able to rub the calves of his legs in the pause he made.

“When that person discloses,” said Mr. Jaggers, straightening himself, “you and that person will settle your own affairs. When that person discloses, my part in this business will cease and determine. When that

person discloses, it will not be necessary for me to know anything about it. And that's all I have got to say."

We looked at one another until I withdrew my eyes, and looked thoughtfully at the floor. From this last speech I derived the notion that Miss Havisham, for some reason or no reason, had not taken him into her confidence as to her designing me for Estella; that he resented this, and felt a jealousy about it; or that he really did object to that scheme, and would have nothing to do with it. When I raised my eyes again, I found that he had been shrewdly looking at me all the time, and was doing so still.

"If that is all you have to say, sir," I remarked, "there can be nothing left for me to say."

He nodded assent, and pulled out his thief-dreaded watch, and asked me where I was going to dine? I replied at my own chambers, with Herbert. As a necessary sequence, I asked him if he would favor us with his company, and he promptly accepted the invitation. But he insisted on walking home with me, in order that I might make no extra preparation for him, and first he had a letter or two to write, and (of course) had his hands to wash. So I said I would go into the outer office and talk to Wemmick.

The fact was, that when the five hundred pounds had come into my pocket, a thought had come into my head which had been often there before; and it appeared to me that Wemmick was a good person to advise with concerning such thought.

He had already locked up his safe, and made preparations for going home. He had left his desk, brought out his two greasy office candlesticks and stood them in line with the snuffers on a slab near the door, ready to be extinguished; he had raked his fire low, put his hat and great-coat ready, and was beating himself all over the chest with his safe-key, as an athletic exercise after business.

"Mr. Wemmick," said I, "I want to ask your opinion. I am very desirous to serve a friend."

Wemmick tightened his post-office and shook his head, as if his opinion were dead against any fatal weakness of that sort.

"This friend," I pursued, "is trying to get on in commercial life, but has no money, and finds it difficult and disheartening to make a beginning. Now I want somehow to help him to a beginning."

"With money down?" said Wemmick, in a tone drier than any sawdust.

“With some money down,” I replied, for an uneasy remembrance shot across me of that symmetrical bundle of papers at home—“with some money down, and perhaps some anticipation of my expectations.”

“Mr. Pip,” said Wemmick, “I should like just to run over with you on my fingers, if you please, the names of the various bridges up as high as Chelsea Reach. Let’s see; there’s London, one; Southwark, two; Blackfriars, three; Waterloo, four; Westminster, five; Vauxhall, six.” He had checked off each bridge in its turn, with the handle of his safe-key on the palm of his hand. “There’s as many as six, you see, to choose from.”

“I don’t understand you,” said I.

“Choose your bridge, Mr. Pip,” returned Wemmick, “and take a walk upon your bridge, and pitch your money into the Thames over the centre arch of your bridge, and you know the end of it. Serve a friend with it, and you may know the end of it too,—but it’s a less pleasant and profitable end.”

I could have posted a newspaper in his mouth, he made it so wide after saying this.

“This is very discouraging,” said I.

“Meant to be so,” said Wemmick.

“Then is it your opinion,” I inquired, with some little indignation, “that a man should never—”

“—Invest portable property in a friend?” said Wemmick. “Certainly he should not. Unless he wants to get rid of the friend,—and then it becomes a question how much portable property it may be worth to get rid of him.”

“And that,” said I, “is your deliberate opinion, Mr. Wemmick?”

“That,” he returned, “is my deliberate opinion in this office.”

“Ah!” said I, pressing him, for I thought I saw him near a loophole here; “but would that be your opinion at Walworth?”

“Mr. Pip,” he replied, with gravity, “Walworth is one place, and this office is another. Much as the Aged is one person, and Mr. Jaggers is another. They must not be confounded together. My Walworth sentiments must be taken at Walworth; none but my official sentiments can be taken in this office.”

“Very well,” said I, much relieved, “then I shall look you up at Walworth, you may depend upon it.”

“Mr. Pip,” he returned, “you will be welcome there, in a private and

personal capacity.”

We had held this conversation in a low voice, well knowing my guardian’s ears to be the sharpest of the sharp. As he now appeared in his doorway, towelling his hands, Wemmick got on his great-coat and stood by to snuff out the candles. We all three went into the street together, and from the door-step Wemmick turned his way, and Mr. Jaggers and I turned ours.

I could not help wishing more than once that evening, that Mr. Jaggers had had an Aged in Gerrard Street, or a Stinger, or a Something, or a Somebody, to unbend his brows a little. It was an uncomfortable consideration on a twenty-first birthday, that coming of age at all seemed hardly worth while in such a guarded and suspicious world as he made of it. He was a thousand times better informed and cleverer than Wemmick, and yet I would a thousand times rather have had Wemmick to dinner. And Mr. Jaggers made not me alone intensely melancholy, because, after he was gone, Herbert said of himself, with his eyes fixed on the fire, that he thought he must have committed a felony and forgotten the details of it, he felt so dejected and guilty.

Chapter XXXVII

DEEMING SUNDAY THE BEST day for taking Mr. Wemmick's Walworth sentiments, I devoted the next ensuing Sunday afternoon to a pilgrimage to the Castle. On arriving before the battlements, I found the Union Jack flying and the drawbridge up; but undeterred by this show of defiance and resistance, I rang at the gate, and was admitted in a most pacific manner by the Aged.

"My son, sir," said the old man, after securing the drawbridge, "rather had it in his mind that you might happen to drop in, and he left word that he would soon be home from his afternoon's walk. He is very regular in his walks, is my son. Very regular in everything, is my son."

I nodded at the old gentleman as Wemmick himself might have nodded, and we went in and sat down by the fireside.

"You made acquaintance with my son, sir," said the old man, in his chirping way, while he warmed his hands at the blaze, "at his office, I expect?" I nodded. "Hah! I have heerd that my son is a wonderful hand at his business, sir?" I nodded hard. "Yes; so they tell me. His business is the Law?" I nodded harder. "Which makes it more surprising in my son," said the old man, "for he was not brought up to the Law, but to the Wine-Coopering."

Curious to know how the old gentleman stood informed concerning the reputation of Mr. Jaggers, I roared that name at him. He threw me into the greatest confusion by laughing heartily and replying in a very sprightly manner, "No, to be sure; you're right." And to this hour I have not the faintest notion what he meant, or what joke he thought I had made.

As I could not sit there nodding at him perpetually, without making some other attempt to interest him, I shouted at inquiry whether his own calling in life had been "the Wine-Coopering." By dint of straining that term out of

myself several times and tapping the old gentleman on the chest to associate it with him, I at last succeeded in making my meaning understood.

"No," said the old gentleman; "the warehousing, the warehousing. First, over yonder;" he appeared to mean up the chimney, but I believe he intended to refer me to Liverpool; "and then in the City of London here. However, having an infirmity—for I am hard of hearing, sir—"

I expressed in pantomime the greatest astonishment.

"—Yes, hard of hearing; having that infirmity coming upon me, my son he went into the Law, and he took charge of me, and he by little and little made out this elegant and beautiful property. But returning to what you said, you know," pursued the old man, again laughing heartily, "what I say is, No to be sure; you're right."

I was modestly wondering whether my utmost ingenuity would have enabled me to say anything that would have amused him half as much as this imaginary pleasantry, when I was startled by a sudden click in the wall on one side of the chimney, and the ghostly tumbling open of a little wooden flap with "JOHN" upon it. The old man, following my eyes, cried with great triumph, "My son's come home!" and we both went out to the drawbridge.

It was worth any money to see Wemmick waving a salute to me from the other side of the moat, when we might have shaken hands across it with the greatest ease. The Aged was so delighted to work the drawbridge, that I made no offer to assist him, but stood quiet until Wemmick had come across, and had presented me to Miss Skiffins; a lady by whom he was accompanied.

Miss Skiffins was of a wooden appearance, and was, like her escort, in the post-office branch of the service. She might have been some two or three years younger than Wemmick, and I judged her to stand possessed of portable property. The cut of her dress from the waist upward, both before and behind, made her figure very like a boy's kite; and I might have pronounced her gown a little too decidedly orange, and her gloves a little too intensely green. But she seemed to be a good sort of fellow, and showed a high regard for the Aged. I was not long in discovering that she was a frequent visitor at the Castle; for, on our going in, and my complimenting Wemmick on his ingenious contrivance for announcing himself to the Aged, he begged me to give my attention for a moment to the other side of

the chimney, and disappeared. Presently another click came, and another little door tumbled open with “Miss Skiffins” on it; then Miss Skiffins shut up and John tumbled open; then Miss Skiffins and John both tumbled open together, and finally shut up together. On Wemmick’s return from working these mechanical appliances, I expressed the great admiration with which I regarded them, and he said, “Well, you know, they’re both pleasant and useful to the Aged. And by George, sir, it’s a thing worth mentioning, that of all the people who come to this gate, the secret of those pulls is only known to the Aged, Miss Skiffins, and me!”

“And Mr. Wemmick made them,” added Miss Skiffins, “with his own hands out of his own head.”

While Miss Skiffins was taking off her bonnet (she retained her green gloves during the evening as an outward and visible sign that there was company), Wemmick invited me to take a walk with him round the property, and see how the island looked in wintertime. Thinking that he did this to give me an opportunity of taking his Walworth sentiments, I seized the opportunity as soon as we were out of the Castle.

Having thought of the matter with care, I approached my subject as if I had never hinted at it before. I informed Wemmick that I was anxious in behalf of Herbert Pocket, and I told him how we had first met, and how we had fought. I glanced at Herbert’s home, and at his character, and at his having no means but such as he was dependent on his father for; those, uncertain and unpunctual. I alluded to the advantages I had derived in my first rawness and ignorance from his society, and I confessed that I feared I had but ill repaid them, and that he might have done better without me and my expectations. Keeping Miss Havisham in the background at a great distance, I still hinted at the possibility of my having competed with him in his prospects, and at the certainty of his possessing a generous soul, and being far above any mean distrusts, retaliations, or designs. For all these reasons (I told Wemmick), and because he was my young companion and friend, and I had a great affection for him, I wished my own good fortune to reflect some rays upon him, and therefore I sought advice from Wemmick’s experience and knowledge of men and affairs, how I could best try with my resources to help Herbert to some present income,—say of a hundred a year, to keep him in good hope and heart,—and gradually to buy him on to some small partnership. I begged Wemmick, in conclusion, to understand

that my help must always be rendered without Herbert's knowledge or suspicion, and that there was no one else in the world with whom I could advise. I wound up by laying my hand upon his shoulder, and saying, "I can't help confiding in you, though I know it must be troublesome to you; but that is your fault, in having ever brought me here."

Wemmick was silent for a little while, and then said with a kind of start, "Well you know, Mr. Pip, I must tell you one thing. This is devilish good of you."

"Say you'll help me to be good then," said I.

"Ecod," replied Wemmick, shaking his head, "that's not my trade."

"Nor is this your trading-place," said I.

"You are right," he returned. "You hit the nail on the head. Mr. Pip, I'll put on my considering-cap, and I think all you want to do may be done by degrees. Skiffins (that's her brother) is an accountant and agent. I'll look him up and go to work for you."

"I thank you ten thousand times."

"On the contrary," said he, "I thank you, for though we are strictly in our private and personal capacity, still it may be mentioned that there are Newgate cobwebs about, and it brushes them away."

After a little further conversation to the same effect, we returned into the Castle where we found Miss Skiffins preparing tea. The responsible duty of making the toast was delegated to the Aged, and that excellent old gentleman was so intent upon it that he seemed to me in some danger of melting his eyes. It was no nominal meal that we were going to make, but a vigorous reality. The Aged prepared such a hay-stack of buttered toast, that I could scarcely see him over it as it simmered on an iron stand hooked on to the top-bar; while Miss Skiffins brewed such a jorum of tea, that the pig in the back premises became strongly excited, and repeatedly expressed his desire to participate in the entertainment.

The flag had been struck, and the gun had been fired, at the right moment of time, and I felt as snugly cut off from the rest of Walworth as if the moat were thirty feet wide by as many deep. Nothing disturbed the tranquillity of the Castle, but the occasional tumbling open of John and Miss Skiffins: which little doors were a prey to some spasmodic infirmity that made me sympathetically uncomfortable until I got used to it. I inferred from the methodical nature of Miss Skiffins's arrangements that she made

tea there every Sunday night; and I rather suspected that a classic brooch she wore, representing the profile of an undesirable female with a very straight nose and a very new moon, was a piece of portable property that had been given her by Wemmick.

We ate the whole of the toast, and drank tea in proportion, and it was delightful to see how warm and greasy we all got after it. The Aged especially, might have passed for some clean old chief of a savage tribe, just oiled. After a short pause of repose, Miss Skiffins—in the absence of the little servant who, it seemed, retired to the bosom of her family on Sunday afternoons—washed up the tea-things, in a trifling lady-like amateur manner that compromised none of us. Then, she put on her gloves again, and we drew round the fire, and Wemmick said, “Now, Aged Parent, tip us the paper.”

Wemmick explained to me while the Aged got his spectacles out, that this was according to custom, and that it gave the old gentleman infinite satisfaction to read the news aloud. “I won’t offer an apology,” said Wemmick, “for he isn’t capable of many pleasures—are you, Aged P.?”

“All right, John, all right,” returned the old man, seeing himself spoken to.

“Only tip him a nod every now and then when he looks off his paper,” said Wemmick, “and he’ll be as happy as a king. We are all attention, Aged One.”

“All right, John, all right!” returned the cheerful old man, so busy and so pleased, that it really was quite charming.

The Aged’s reading reminded me of the classes at Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt’s, with the pleasanter peculiarity that it seemed to come through a keyhole. As he wanted the candles close to him, and as he was always on the verge of putting either his head or the newspaper into them, he required as much watching as a powder-mill. But Wemmick was equally untiring and gentle in his vigilance, and the Aged read on, quite unconscious of his many rescues. Whenever he looked at us, we all expressed the greatest interest and amazement, and nodded until he resumed again.

As Wemmick and Miss Skiffins sat side by side, and as I sat in a shadowy corner, I observed a slow and gradual elongation of Mr. Wemmick’s mouth, powerfully suggestive of his slowly and gradually stealing his arm round Miss Skiffins’s waist. In course of time I saw his

hand appear on the other side of Miss Skiffins; but at that moment Miss Skiffins neatly stopped him with the green glove, unwound his arm again as if it were an article of dress, and with the greatest deliberation laid it on the table before her. Miss Skiffins's composure while she did this was one of the most remarkable sights I have ever seen, and if I could have thought the act consistent with abstraction of mind, I should have deemed that Miss Skiffins performed it mechanically.

By and by, I noticed Wemmick's arm beginning to disappear again, and gradually fading out of view. Shortly afterwards, his mouth began to widen again. After an interval of suspense on my part that was quite enthralling and almost painful, I saw his hand appear on the other side of Miss Skiffins. Instantly, Miss Skiffins stopped it with the neatness of a placid boxer, took off that girdle or cestus as before, and laid it on the table. Taking the table to represent the path of virtue, I am justified in stating that during the whole time of the Aged's reading, Wemmick's arm was straying from the path of virtue and being recalled to it by Miss Skiffins.

At last, the Aged read himself into a light slumber. This was the time for Wemmick to produce a little kettle, a tray of glasses, and a black bottle with a porcelain-topped cork, representing some clerical dignitary of a rubicund and social aspect. With the aid of these appliances we all had something warm to drink, including the Aged, who was soon awake again. Miss Skiffins mixed, and I observed that she and Wemmick drank out of one glass. Of course I knew better than to offer to see Miss Skiffins home, and under the circumstances I thought I had best go first; which I did, taking a cordial leave of the Aged, and having passed a pleasant evening.

Before a week was out, I received a note from Wemmick, dated Walworth, stating that he hoped he had made some advance in that matter appertaining to our private and personal capacities, and that he would be glad if I could come and see him again upon it. So, I went out to Walworth again, and yet again, and yet again, and I saw him by appointment in the City several times, but never held any communication with him on the subject in or near Little Britain. The upshot was, that we found a worthy young merchant or shipping-broker, not long established in business, who wanted intelligent help, and who wanted capital, and who in due course of time and receipt would want a partner. Between him and me, secret articles were signed of which Herbert was the subject, and I paid him half of my

five hundred pounds down, and engaged for sundry other payments: some, to fall due at certain dates out of my income: some, contingent on my coming into my property. Miss Skiffins's brother conducted the negotiation. Wemmick pervaded it throughout, but never appeared in it.

The whole business was so cleverly managed, that Herbert had not the least suspicion of my hand being in it. I never shall forget the radiant face with which he came home one afternoon, and told me, as a mighty piece of news, of his having fallen in with one Clarriker (the young merchant's name), and of Clarriker's having shown an extraordinary inclination towards him, and of his belief that the opening had come at last. Day by day as his hopes grew stronger and his face brighter, he must have thought me a more and more affectionate friend, for I had the greatest difficulty in restraining my tears of triumph when I saw him so happy. At length, the thing being done, and he having that day entered Clarriker's House, and he having talked to me for a whole evening in a flush of pleasure and success, I did really cry in good earnest when I went to bed, to think that my expectations had done some good to somebody.

A great event in my life, the turning point of my life, now opens on my view. But, before I proceed to narrate it, and before I pass on to all the changes it involved, I must give one chapter to Estella. It is not much to give to the theme that so long filled my heart.

Chapter XXXVIII

IF THAT STAID OLD house near the Green at Richmond should ever come to be haunted when I am dead, it will be haunted, surely, by my ghost. O the many, many nights and days through which the unquiet spirit within me haunted that house when Estella lived there! Let my body be where it would, my spirit was always wandering, wandering, wandering, about that house.

The lady with whom Estella was placed, Mrs. Brandley by name, was a widow, with one daughter several years older than Estella. The mother looked young, and the daughter looked old; the mother's complexion was pink, and the daughter's was yellow; the mother set up for frivolity, and the daughter for theology. They were in what is called a good position, and visited, and were visited by, numbers of people. Little, if any, community of feeling subsisted between them and Estella, but the understanding was established that they were necessary to her, and that she was necessary to them. Mrs. Brandley had been a friend of Miss Havisham's before the time of her seclusion.

In Mrs. Brandley's house and out of Mrs. Brandley's house, I suffered every kind and degree of torture that Estella could cause me. The nature of my relations with her, which placed me on terms of familiarity without placing me on terms of favor, conduced to my distraction. She made use of me to tease other admirers, and she turned the very familiarity between herself and me to the account of putting a constant slight on my devotion to her. If I had been her secretary, steward, half-brother, poor relation,—if I had been a younger brother of her appointed husband,—I could not have seemed to myself further from my hopes when I was nearest to her. The privilege of calling her by her name and hearing her call me by mine became, under the circumstances an aggravation of my trials; and while I

think it likely that it almost maddened her other lovers, I know too certainly that it almost maddened me.

She had admirers without end. No doubt my jealousy made an admirer of every one who went near her; but there were more than enough of them without that.

I saw her often at Richmond, I heard of her often in town, and I used often to take her and the Brandleys on the water; there were picnics, fête days, plays, operas, concerts, parties, all sorts of pleasures, through which I pursued her,—and they were all miseries to me. I never had one hour's happiness in her society, and yet my mind all round the four-and-twenty hours was harping on the happiness of having her with me unto death.

Throughout this part of our intercourse,—and it lasted, as will presently be seen, for what I then thought a long time,—she habitually reverted to that tone which expressed that our association was forced upon us. There were other times when she would come to a sudden check in this tone and in all her many tones, and would seem to pity me.

"Pip, Pip," she said one evening, coming to such a check, when we sat apart at a darkening window of the house in Richmond; "will you never take warning?"

"Of what?"

"Of me."

"Warning not to be attracted by you, do you mean, Estella?"

"Do I mean! If you don't know what I mean, you are blind."

I should have replied that Love was commonly reputed blind, but for the reason that I always was restrained—and this was not the least of my miseries—by a feeling that it was ungenerous to press myself upon her, when she knew that she could not choose but obey Miss Havisham. My dread always was, that this knowledge on her part laid me under a heavy disadvantage with her pride, and made me the subject of a rebellious struggle in her bosom.

"At any rate," said I, "I have no warning given me just now, for you wrote to me to come to you, this time."

"That's true," said Estella, with a cold careless smile that always chilled me.

After looking at the twilight without, for a little while, she went on to say:—

“The time has come round when Miss Havisham wishes to have me for a day at Satis. You are to take me there, and bring me back, if you will. She would rather I did not travel alone, and objects to receiving my maid, for she has a sensitive horror of being talked of by such people. Can you take me?”

“Can I take you, Estella!”

“You can then? The day after to-morrow, if you please. You are to pay all charges out of my purse. You hear the condition of your going?”

“And must obey,” said I.

This was all the preparation I received for that visit, or for others like it; Miss Havisham never wrote to me, nor had I ever so much as seen her handwriting. We went down on the next day but one, and we found her in the room where I had first beheld her, and it is needless to add that there was no change in Satis House.

She was even more dreadfully fond of Estella than she had been when I last saw them together; I repeat the word advisedly, for there was something positively dreadful in the energy of her looks and embraces. She hung upon Estella’s beauty, hung upon her words, hung upon her gestures, and sat mumbling her own trembling fingers while she looked at her, as though she were devouring the beautiful creature she had reared.

From Estella she looked at me, with a searching glance that seemed to pry into my heart and probe its wounds. “How does she use you, Pip; how does she use you?” she asked me again, with her witch-like eagerness, even in Estella’s hearing. But, when we sat by her flickering fire at night, she was most weird; for then, keeping Estella’s hand drawn through her arm and clutched in her own hand, she extorted from her, by dint of referring back to what Estella had told her in her regular letters, the names and conditions of the men whom she had fascinated; and as Miss Havisham dwelt upon this roll, with the intensity of a mind mortally hurt and diseased, she sat with her other hand on her crutch stick, and her chin on that, and her wan bright eyes glaring at me, a very spectre.

I saw in this, wretched though it made me, and bitter the sense of dependence and even of degradation that it awakened,—I saw in this that Estella was set to wreak Miss Havisham’s revenge on men, and that she was not to be given to me until she had gratified it for a term. I saw in this, a reason for her being beforehand assigned to me. Sending her out to attract

and torment and do mischief, Miss Havisham sent her with the malicious assurance that she was beyond the reach of all admirers, and that all who staked upon that cast were secured to lose. I saw in this that I, too, was tormented by a perversion of ingenuity, even while the prize was reserved for me. I saw in this the reason for my being staved off so long and the reason for my late guardian's declining to commit himself to the formal knowledge of such a scheme. In a word, I saw in this Miss Havisham as I had her then and there before my eyes, and always had had her before my eyes; and I saw in this, the distinct shadow of the darkened and unhealthy house in which her life was hidden from the sun.

The candles that lighted that room of hers were placed in sconces on the wall. They were high from the ground, and they burnt with the steady dulness of artificial light in air that is seldom renewed. As I looked round at them, and at the pale gloom they made, and at the stopped clock, and at the withered articles of bridal dress upon the table and the ground, and at her own awful figure with its ghostly reflection thrown large by the fire upon the ceiling and the wall, I saw in everything the construction that my mind had come to, repeated and thrown back to me. My thoughts passed into the great room across the landing where the table was spread, and I saw it written, as it were, in the falls of the cobwebs from the centre-piece, in the crawlings of the spiders on the cloth, in the tracks of the mice as they betook their little quickened hearts behind the panels, and in the gropings and pausings of the beetles on the floor.

It happened on the occasion of this visit that some sharp words arose between Estella and Miss Havisham. It was the first time I had ever seen them opposed.

We were seated by the fire, as just now described, and Miss Havisham still had Estella's arm drawn through her own, and still clutched Estella's hand in hers, when Estella gradually began to detach herself. She had shown a proud impatience more than once before, and had rather endured that fierce affection than accepted or returned it.

"What!" said Miss Havisham, flashing her eyes upon her, "are you tired of me?"

"Only a little tired of myself," replied Estella, disengaging her arm, and moving to the great chimney-piece, where she stood looking down at the fire.

“Speak the truth, you ingrate!” cried Miss Havisham, passionately striking her stick upon the floor; “you are tired of me.”

Estella looked at her with perfect composure, and again looked down at the fire. Her graceful figure and her beautiful face expressed a self-possessed indifference to the wild heat of the other, that was almost cruel.

“You stock and stone!” exclaimed Miss Havisham. “You cold, cold heart!”

“What?” said Estella, preserving her attitude of indifference as she leaned against the great chimney-piece and only moving her eyes; “do you reproach me for being cold? You?”

“Are you not?” was the fierce retort.

“You should know,” said Estella. “I am what you have made me. Take all the praise, take all the blame; take all the success, take all the failure; in short, take me.”

“O, look at her, look at her!” cried Miss Havisham, bitterly; “Look at her so hard and thankless, on the hearth where she was reared! Where I took her into this wretched breast when it was first bleeding from its stabs, and where I have lavished years of tenderness upon her!”

“At least I was no party to the compact,” said Estella, “for if I could walk and speak, when it was made, it was as much as I could do. But what would you have? You have been very good to me, and I owe everything to you. What would you have?”

“Love,” replied the other.

“You have it.”

“I have not,” said Miss Havisham.

“Mother by adoption,” retorted Estella, never departing from the easy grace of her attitude, never raising her voice as the other did, never yielding either to anger or tenderness,—“mother by adoption, I have said that I owe everything to you. All I possess is freely yours. All that you have given me, is at your command to have again. Beyond that, I have nothing. And if you ask me to give you, what you never gave me, my gratitude and duty cannot do impossibilities.”

“Did I never give her love!” cried Miss Havisham, turning wildly to me. “Did I never give her a burning love, inseparable from jealousy at all times, and from sharp pain, while she speaks thus to me! Let her call me mad, let her call me mad!”

“Why should I call you mad,” returned Estella, “I, of all people? Does any one live, who knows what set purposes you have, half as well as I do? Does any one live, who knows what a steady memory you have, half as well as I do? I who have sat on this same hearth on the little stool that is even now beside you there, learning your lessons and looking up into your face, when your face was strange and frightened me!”

“Soon forgotten!” moaned Miss Havisham. “Times soon forgotten!”

“No, not forgotten,” retorted Estella,—“not forgotten, but treasured up in my memory. When have you found me false to your teaching? When have you found me unmindful of your lessons? When have you found me giving admission here,” she touched her bosom with her hand, “to anything that you excluded? Be just to me.”

“So proud, so proud!” moaned Miss Havisham, pushing away her gray hair with both her hands.

“Who taught me to be proud?” returned Estella. “Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?”

“So hard, so hard!” moaned Miss Havisham, with her former action.

“Who taught me to be hard?” returned Estella. “Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?”

“But to be proud and hard to me!” Miss Havisham quite shrieked, as she stretched out her arms. “Estella, Estella, Estella, to be proud and hard to me!”

Estella looked at her for a moment with a kind of calm wonder, but was not otherwise disturbed; when the moment was past, she looked down at the fire again.

“I cannot think,” said Estella, raising her eyes after a silence “why you should be so unreasonable when I come to see you after a separation. I have never forgotten your wrongs and their causes. I have never been unfaithful to you or your schooling. I have never shown any weakness that I can charge myself with.”

“Would it be weakness to return my love?” exclaimed Miss Havisham. “But yes, yes, she would call it so!”

“I begin to think,” said Estella, in a musing way, after another moment of calm wonder, “that I almost understand how this comes about. If you had brought up your adopted daughter wholly in the dark confinement of these rooms, and had never let her know that there was such a thing as the

daylight by which she had never once seen your face,—if you had done that, and then, for a purpose had wanted her to understand the daylight and know all about it, you would have been disappointed and angry?"

Miss Havisham, with her head in her hands, sat making a low moaning, and swaying herself on her chair, but gave no answer.

"Or," said Estella,—"which is a nearer case,—if you had taught her, from the dawn of her intelligence, with your utmost energy and might, that there was such a thing as daylight, but that it was made to be her enemy and destroyer, and she must always turn against it, for it had blighted you and would else blight her;—if you had done this, and then, for a purpose, had wanted her to take naturally to the daylight and she could not do it, you would have been disappointed and angry?"

Miss Havisham sat listening (or it seemed so, for I could not see her face), but still made no answer.

"So," said Estella, "I must be taken as I have been made. The success is not mine, the failure is not mine, but the two together make me."

Miss Havisham had settled down, I hardly knew how, upon the floor, among the faded bridal relics with which it was strewn. I took advantage of the moment—I had sought one from the first—to leave the room, after beseeching Estella's attention to her, with a movement of my hand. When I left, Estella was yet standing by the great chimney-piece, just as she had stood throughout. Miss Havisham's gray hair was all adrift upon the ground, among the other bridal wrecks, and was a miserable sight to see.

It was with a depressed heart that I walked in the starlight for an hour and more, about the courtyard, and about the brewery, and about the ruined garden. When I at last took courage to return to the room, I found Estella sitting at Miss Havisham's knee, taking up some stitches in one of those old articles of dress that were dropping to pieces, and of which I have often been reminded since by the faded tatters of old banners that I have seen hanging up in cathedrals. Afterwards, Estella and I played at cards, as of yore,—only we were skilful now, and played French games,—and so the evening wore away, and I went to bed.

I lay in that separate building across the courtyard. It was the first time I had ever lain down to rest in Satis House, and sleep refused to come near me. A thousand Miss Havishams haunted me. She was on this side of my pillow, on that, at the head of the bed, at the foot, behind the half-opened

door of the dressing-room, in the dressing-room, in the room overhead, in the room beneath,—everywhere. At last, when the night was slow to creep on towards two o'clock, I felt that I absolutely could no longer bear the place as a place to lie down in, and that I must get up. I therefore got up and put on my clothes, and went out across the yard into the long stone passage, designing to gain the outer courtyard and walk there for the relief of my mind. But I was no sooner in the passage than I extinguished my candle; for I saw Miss Havisham going along it in a ghostly manner, making a low cry. I followed her at a distance, and saw her go up the staircase. She carried a bare candle in her hand, which she had probably taken from one of the sconces in her own room, and was a most unearthly object by its light. Standing at the bottom of the staircase, I felt the mildewed air of the feast-chamber, without seeing her open the door, and I heard her walking there, and so across into her own room, and so across again into that, never ceasing the low cry. After a time, I tried in the dark both to get out, and to go back, but I could do neither until some streaks of day strayed in and showed me where to lay my hands. During the whole interval, whenever I went to the bottom of the staircase, I heard her footstep, saw her light pass above, and heard her ceaseless low cry.

Before we left next day, there was no revival of the difference between her and Estella, nor was it ever revived on any similar occasion; and there were four similar occasions, to the best of my remembrance. Nor, did Miss Havisham's manner towards Estella in anywise change, except that I believed it to have something like fear infused among its former characteristics.

It is impossible to turn this leaf of my life, without putting Bentley Drummle's name upon it; or I would, very gladly.

On a certain occasion when the Finches were assembled in force, and when good feeling was being promoted in the usual manner by nobody's agreeing with anybody else, the presiding Finch called the Grove to order, forasmuch as Mr. Drummle had not yet toasted a lady; which, according to the solemn constitution of the society, it was the brute's turn to do that day. I thought I saw him leer in an ugly way at me while the decanters were going round, but as there was no love lost between us, that might easily be. What was my indignant surprise when he called upon the company to pledge him to "Estella!"

“Estella who?” said I.

“Never you mind,” retorted Drummle.

“Estella of where?” said I. “You are bound to say of where.” Which he was, as a Finch.

“Of Richmond, gentlemen,” said Drummle, putting me out of the question, “and a peerless beauty.”

Much he knew about peerless beauties, a mean, miserable idiot! I whispered Herbert.

“I know that lady,” said Herbert, across the table, when the toast had been honored.

“Do you?” said Drummle.

“And so do I,” I added, with a scarlet face.

“Do you?” said Drummle. “O, Lord!”

This was the only retort—except glass or crockery—that the heavy creature was capable of making; but, I became as highly incensed by it as if it had been barbed with wit, and I immediately rose in my place and said that I could not but regard it as being like the honorable Finch’s impudence to come down to that Grove,—we always talked about coming down to that Grove, as a neat Parliamentary turn of expression,—down to that Grove, proposing a lady of whom he knew nothing. Mr. Drummle, upon this, starting up, demanded what I meant by that? Whereupon I made him the extreme reply that I believed he knew where I was to be found.

Whether it was possible in a Christian country to get on without blood, after this, was a question on which the Finches were divided. The debate upon it grew so lively, indeed, that at least six more honorable members told six more, during the discussion, that they believed they knew where they were to be found. However, it was decided at last (the Grove being a Court of Honor) that if Mr. Drummle would bring never so slight a certificate from the lady, importing that he had the honor of her acquaintance, Mr. Pip must express his regret, as a gentleman and a Finch, for “having been betrayed into a warmth which.” Next day was appointed for the production (lest our honor should take cold from delay), and next day Drummle appeared with a polite little avowal in Estella’s hand, that she had had the honor of dancing with him several times. This left me no course but to regret that I had been “betrayed into a warmth which,” and on the whole to repudiate, as untenable, the idea that I was to be found anywhere.

Drummle and I then sat snorting at one another for an hour, while the Grove engaged in indiscriminate contradiction, and finally the promotion of good feeling was declared to have gone ahead at an amazing rate.

I tell this lightly, but it was no light thing to me. For, I cannot adequately express what pain it gave me to think that Estella should show any favor to a contemptible, clumsy, sulky booby, so very far below the average. To the present moment, I believe it to have been referable to some pure fire of generosity and disinterestedness in my love for her, that I could not endure the thought of her stooping to that hound. No doubt I should have been miserable whomsoever she had favored; but a worthier object would have caused me a different kind and degree of distress.

It was easy for me to find out, and I did soon find out, that Drummle had begun to follow her closely, and that she allowed him to do it. A little while, and he was always in pursuit of her, and he and I crossed one another every day. He held on, in a dull persistent way, and Estella held him on; now with encouragement, now with discouragement, now almost flattering him, now openly despising him, now knowing him very well, now scarcely remembering who he was.

The Spider, as Mr. Jaggers had called him, was used to lying in wait, however, and had the patience of his tribe. Added to that, he had a blockhead confidence in his money and in his family greatness, which sometimes did him good service,—almost taking the place of concentration and determined purpose. So, the Spider, doggedly watching Estella, outwatched many brighter insects, and would often uncoil himself and drop at the right nick of time.

At a certain Assembly Ball at Richmond (there used to be Assembly Balls at most places then), where Estella had outshone all other beauties, this blundering Drummle so hung about her, and with so much toleration on her part, that I resolved to speak to her concerning him. I took the next opportunity; which was when she was waiting for Mrs. Blandley to take her home, and was sitting apart among some flowers, ready to go. I was with her, for I almost always accompanied them to and from such places.

“Are you tired, Estella?”

“Rather, Pip.”

“You should be.”

“Say rather, I should not be; for I have my letter to Satis House to write,

before I go to sleep."

"Recounting to-night's triumph?" said I. "Surely a very poor one, Estella."

"What do you mean? I didn't know there had been any."

"Estella," said I, "do look at that fellow in the corner yonder, who is looking over here at us."

"Why should I look at him?" returned Estella, with her eyes on me instead. "What is there in that fellow in the corner yonder,—to use your words,—that I need look at?"

"Indeed, that is the very question I want to ask you," said I. "For he has been hovering about you all night."

"Moths, and all sorts of ugly creatures," replied Estella, with a glance towards him, "hover about a lighted candle. Can the candle help it?"

"No," I returned; "but cannot the Estella help it?"

"Well!" said she, laughing, after a moment, "perhaps. Yes. Anything you like."

"But, Estella, do hear me speak. It makes me wretched that you should encourage a man so generally despised as Drummle. You know he is despised."

"Well?" said she.

"You know he is as ungainly within as without. A deficient, ill-tempered, lowering, stupid fellow."

"Well?" said she.

"You know he has nothing to recommend him but money and a ridiculous roll of addle-headed predecessors; now, don't you?"

"Well?" said she again; and each time she said it, she opened her lovely eyes the wider.

To overcome the difficulty of getting past that monosyllable, I took it from her, and said, repeating it with emphasis, "Well! Then, that is why it makes me wretched."

Now, if I could have believed that she favored Drummle with any idea of making me—me—wretched, I should have been in better heart about it; but in that habitual way of hers, she put me so entirely out of the question, that I could believe nothing of the kind.

"Pip," said Estella, casting her glance over the room, "don't be foolish about its effect on you. It may have its effect on others, and may be meant

to have. It’s not worth discussing.”

“Yes it is,” said I, “because I cannot bear that people should say, ‘she throws away her graces and attractions on a mere boor, the lowest in the crowd.’”

“I can bear it,” said Estella.

“Oh! don’t be so proud, Estella, and so inflexible.”

“Calls me proud and inflexible in this breath!” said Estella, opening her hands. “And in his last breath reproached me for stooping to a boor!”

“There is no doubt you do,” said I, something hurriedly, “for I have seen you give him looks and smiles this very night, such as you never give to—me.”

“Do you want me then,” said Estella, turning suddenly with a fixed and serious, if not angry, look, “to deceive and entrap you?”

“Do you deceive and entrap him, Estella?”

“Yes, and many others,—all of them but you. Here is Mrs. Brandley. I’ll say no more.”

And now that I have given the one chapter to the theme that so filled my heart, and so often made it ache and ache again, I pass on unhindered, to the event that had impended over me longer yet; the event that had begun to be prepared for, before I knew that the world held Estella, and in the days when her baby intelligence was receiving its first distortions from Miss Havisham’s wasting hands.

In the Eastern story, the heavy slab that was to fall on the bed of state in the flush of conquest was slowly wrought out of the quarry, the tunnel for the rope to hold it in its place was slowly carried through the leagues of rock, the slab was slowly raised and fitted in the roof, the rope was rove to it and slowly taken through the miles of hollow to the great iron ring. All being made ready with much labor, and the hour come, the sultan was aroused in the dead of the night, and the sharpened axe that was to sever the rope from the great iron ring was put into his hand, and he struck with it, and the rope parted and rushed away, and the ceiling fell. So, in my case; all the work, near and afar, that tended to the end, had been accomplished; and in an instant the blow was struck, and the roof of my stronghold dropped upon me.

Chapter XXXIX

I WAS THREE-AND-TWENTY YEARS of age. Not another word had I heard to enlighten me on the subject of my expectations, and my twenty-third birthday was a week gone. We had left Barnard's Inn more than a year, and lived in the Temple. Our chambers were in Garden-court, down by the river.

Mr. Pocket and I had for some time parted company as to our original relations, though we continued on the best terms. Notwithstanding my inability to settle to anything,—which I hope arose out of the restless and incomplete tenure on which I held my means,—I had a taste for reading, and read regularly so many hours a day. That matter of Herbert's was still progressing, and everything with me was as I have brought it down to the close of the last preceding chapter.

Business had taken Herbert on a journey to Marseilles. I was alone, and had a dull sense of being alone. Dispirited and anxious, long hoping that to-morrow or next week would clear my way, and long disappointed, I sadly missed the cheerful face and ready response of my friend.

It was wretched weather; stormy and wet, stormy and wet; and mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets. Day after day, a vast heavy veil had been driving over London from the East, and it drove still, as if in the East there were an Eternity of cloud and wind. So furious had been the gusts, that high buildings in town had had the lead stripped off their roofs; and in the country, trees had been torn up, and sails of windmills carried away; and gloomy accounts had come in from the coast, of shipwreck and death. Violent blasts of rain had accompanied these rages of wind, and the day just closed as I sat down to read had been the worst of all.

Alterations have been made in that part of the Temple since that time, and it has not now so lonely a character as it had then, nor is it so exposed to the river. We lived at the top of the last house, and the wind rushing up

the river shook the house that night, like discharges of cannon, or breakings of a sea. When the rain came with it and dashed against the windows, I thought, raising my eyes to them as they rocked, that I might have fancied myself in a storm-beaten lighthouse. Occasionally, the smoke came rolling down the chimney as though it could not bear to go out into such a night; and when I set the doors open and looked down the staircase, the staircase lamps were blown out; and when I shaded my face with my hands and looked through the black windows (opening them ever so little was out of the question in the teeth of such wind and rain), I saw that the lamps in the court were blown out, and that the lamps on the bridges and the shore were shuddering, and that the coal-fires in barges on the river were being carried away before the wind like red-hot splashes in the rain.

I read with my watch upon the table, purposing to close my book at eleven o'clock. As I shut it, Saint Paul's, and all the many church-clocks in the City—some leading, some accompanying, some following—struck that hour. The sound was curiously flawed by the wind; and I was listening, and thinking how the wind assailed and tore it, when I heard a footstep on the stair.

What nervous folly made me start, and awfully connect it with the footstep of my dead sister, matters not. It was past in a moment, and I listened again, and heard the footstep stumble in coming on. Remembering then, that the staircase-lights were blown out, I took up my reading-lamp and went out to the stair-head. Whoever was below had stopped on seeing my lamp, for all was quiet.

"There is some one down there, is there not?" I called out, looking down.

"Yes," said a voice from the darkness beneath.

"What floor do you want?"

"The top. Mr. Pip."

"That is my name.— There is nothing the matter?"

"Nothing the matter," returned the voice. And the man came on.

I stood with my lamp held out over the stair-rail, and he came slowly within its light. It was a shaded lamp, to shine upon a book, and its circle of light was very contracted; so that he was in it for a mere instant, and then out of it. In the instant, I had seen a face that was strange to me, looking up with an incomprehensible air of being touched and pleased by the sight of me.

Moving the lamp as the man moved, I made out that he was substantially dressed, but roughly, like a voyager by sea. That he had long iron-gray hair. That his age was about sixty. That he was a muscular man, strong on his legs, and that he was browned and hardened by exposure to weather. As he ascended the last stair or two, and the light of my lamp included us both, I saw, with a stupid kind of amazement, that he was holding out both his hands to me.

“Pray what is your business?” I asked him.

“My business?” he repeated, pausing. “Ah! Yes. I will explain my business, by your leave.”

“Do you wish to come in?”

“Yes,” he replied; “I wish to come in, master.”

I had asked him the question inhospitably enough, for I resented the sort of bright and gratified recognition that still shone in his face. I resented it, because it seemed to imply that he expected me to respond to it. But I took him into the room I had just left, and, having set the lamp on the table, asked him as civilly as I could to explain himself.

He looked about him with the strangest air,—an air of wondering pleasure, as if he had some part in the things he admired,—and he pulled off a rough outer coat, and his hat. Then, I saw that his head was furrowed and bald, and that the long iron-gray hair grew only on its sides. But, I saw nothing that in the least explained him. On the contrary, I saw him next moment, once more holding out both his hands to me.

“What do you mean?” said I, half suspecting him to be mad.

He stopped in his looking at me, and slowly rubbed his right hand over his head. “It’s disapinting to a man,” he said, in a coarse broken voice, “arter having looked for’ard so distant, and come so fur; but you’re not to blame for that,—neither on us is to blame for that. I’ll speak in half a minute. Give me half a minute, please.”

He sat down on a chair that stood before the fire, and covered his forehead with his large brown veinous hands. I looked at him attentively then, and recoiled a little from him; but I did not know him.

“There’s no one nigh,” said he, looking over his shoulder; “is there?”

“Why do you, a stranger coming into my rooms at this time of the night, ask that question?” said I.

“You’re a game one,” he returned, shaking his head at me with a

deliberate affection, at once most unintelligible and most exasperating; “I’m glad you’ve grow’d up, a game one! But don’t catch hold of me. You’d be sorry arterwards to have done it.”

I relinquished the intention he had detected, for I knew him! Even yet I could not recall a single feature, but I knew him! If the wind and the rain had driven away the intervening years, had scattered all the intervening objects, had swept us to the churchyard where we first stood face to face on such different levels, I could not have known my convict more distinctly than I knew him now as he sat in the chair before the fire. No need to take a file from his pocket and show it to me; no need to take the handkerchief from his neck and twist it round his head; no need to hug himself with both his arms, and take a shivering turn across the room, looking back at me for recognition. I knew him before he gave me one of those aids, though, a moment before, I had not been conscious of remotely suspecting his identity.

He came back to where I stood, and again held out both his hands. Not knowing what to do,—for, in my astonishment I had lost my self-possession,—I reluctantly gave him my hands. He grasped them heartily, raised them to his lips, kissed them, and still held them.

“You acted noble, my boy,” said he. “Noble, Pip! And I have never forgot it!”

At a change in his manner as if he were even going to embrace me, I laid a hand upon his breast and put him away.

“Stay!” said I. “Keep off! If you are grateful to me for what I did when I was a little child, I hope you have shown your gratitude by mending your way of life. If you have come here to thank me, it was not necessary. Still, however you have found me out, there must be something good in the feeling that has brought you here, and I will not repulse you; but surely you must understand that—I—”

My attention was so attracted by the singularity of his fixed look at me, that the words died away on my tongue.

“You was a saying,” he observed, when we had confronted one another in silence, “that surely I must understand. What, surely must I understand?”

“That I cannot wish to renew that chance intercourse with you of long ago, under these different circumstances. I am glad to believe you have repented and recovered yourself. I am glad to tell you so. I am glad that,

thinking I deserve to be thanked, you have come to thank me. But our ways are different ways, none the less. You are wet, and you look weary. Will you drink something before you go?”

He had replaced his neckerchief loosely, and had stood, keenly observant of me, biting a long end of it. “I think,” he answered, still with the end at his mouth and still observant of me, “that I will drink (I thank you) afore I go.”

There was a tray ready on a side-table. I brought it to the table near the fire, and asked him what he would have? He touched one of the bottles without looking at it or speaking, and I made him some hot rum and water. I tried to keep my hand steady while I did so, but his look at me as he leaned back in his chair with the long draggled end of his neckerchief between his teeth—evidently forgotten—made my hand very difficult to master. When at last I put the glass to him, I saw with amazement that his eyes were full of tears.

Up to this time I had remained standing, not to disguise that I wished him gone. But I was softened by the softened aspect of the man, and felt a touch of reproach. “I hope,” said I, hurriedly putting something into a glass for myself, and drawing a chair to the table, “that you will not think I spoke harshly to you just now. I had no intention of doing it, and I am sorry for it if I did. I wish you well and happy!”

As I put my glass to my lips, he glanced with surprise at the end of his neckerchief, dropping from his mouth when he opened it, and stretched out his hand. I gave him mine, and then he drank, and drew his sleeve across his eyes and forehead.

“How are you living?” I asked him.

“I’ve been a sheep-farmer, stock-breeder, other trades besides, away in the new world,” said he; “many a thousand mile of stormy water off from this.”

“I hope you have done well?”

“I’ve done wonderfully well. There’s others went out alonger me as has done well too, but no man has done nigh as well as me. I’m famous for it.”

“I am glad to hear it.”

“I hope to hear you say so, my dear boy.”

Without stopping to try to understand those words or the tone in which they were spoken, I turned off to a point that had just come into my mind.

“Have you ever seen a messenger you once sent to me,” I inquired,

“since he undertook that trust?”

“Never set eyes upon him. I warn’t likely to it.”

“He came faithfully, and he brought me the two one-pound notes. I was a poor boy then, as you know, and to a poor boy they were a little fortune. But, like you, I have done well since, and you must let me pay them back. You can put them to some other poor boy’s use.” I took out my purse.

He watched me as I laid my purse upon the table and opened it, and he watched me as I separated two one-pound notes from its contents. They were clean and new, and I spread them out and handed them over to him. Still watching me, he laid them one upon the other, folded them long-wise, gave them a twist, set fire to them at the lamp, and dropped the ashes into the tray.

“May I make so bold,” he said then, with a smile that was like a frown, and with a frown that was like a smile, “as ask you how you have done well, since you and me was out on them lone shivering marshes?”

“How?”

“Ah!”

He emptied his glass, got up, and stood at the side of the fire, with his heavy brown hand on the mantel-shelf. He put a foot up to the bars, to dry and warm it, and the wet boot began to steam; but, he neither looked at it, nor at the fire, but steadily looked at me. It was only now that I began to tremble.

When my lips had parted, and had shaped some words that were without sound, I forced myself to tell him (though I could not do it distinctly), that I had been chosen to succeed to some property.

“Might a mere warmint ask what property?” said he.

I faltered, “I don’t know.”

“Might a mere warmint ask whose property?” said he.

I faltered again, “I don’t know.”

“Could I make a guess, I wonder,” said the Convict, “at your income since you come of age! As to the first figure now. Five?”

With my heart beating like a heavy hammer of disordered action, I rose out of my chair, and stood with my hand upon the back of it, looking wildly at him.

“Concerning a guardian,” he went on. “There ought to have been some guardian, or such-like, whiles you was a minor. Some lawyer, maybe. As to

the first letter of that lawyer's name now. Would it be J?"

All the truth of my position came flashing on me; and its disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds, rushed in in such a multitude that I was borne down by them and had to struggle for every breath I drew.

"Put it," he resumed, "as the employer of that lawyer whose name begun with a J, and might be Jaggers,—put it as he had come over sea to Portsmouth, and had landed there, and had wanted to come on to you. 'However, you have found me out,' you says just now. Well! However, did I find you out? Why, I wrote from Portsmouth to a person in London, for particulars of your address. That person's name? Why, Wemmick."

I could not have spoken one word, though it had been to save my life. I stood, with a hand on the chair-back and a hand on my breast, where I seemed to be suffocating,—I stood so, looking wildly at him, until I grasped at the chair, when the room began to surge and turn. He caught me, drew me to the sofa, put me up against the cushions, and bent on one knee before me, bringing the face that I now well remembered, and that I shuddered at, very near to mine.

"Yes, Pip, dear boy, I've made a gentleman on you! It's me wot has done it! I swore that time, sure as ever I earned a guinea, that guinea should go to you. I swore arterwards, sure as ever I spec'lated and got rich, you should get rich. I lived rough, that you should live smooth; I worked hard, that you should be above work. What odds, dear boy? Do I tell it, fur you to feel a obligation? Not a bit. I tell it, fur you to know as that there hunted dunghill dog wot you kep life in, got his head so high that he could make a gentleman,—and, Pip, you're him!"

The abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him, could not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast.

"Look'ee here, Pip. I'm your second father. You're my son,—more to me nor any son. I've put away money, only for you to spend. When I was a hired-out shepherd in a solitary hut, not seeing no faces but faces of sheep till I half forgot wot men's and women's faces wos like, I see yourn. I drops my knife many a time in that hut when I was a-eating my dinner or my supper, and I says, 'Here's the boy again, a looking at me whiles I eats and drinks!' I see you there a many times, as plain as ever I see you on them

misty marshes. ‘Lord strike me dead!’ I says each time,—and I goes out in the air to say it under the open heavens,—‘but wot, if I gets liberty and money, I’ll make that boy a gentleman!’ And I done it. Why, look at you, dear boy! Look at these here lodgings o’yourn, fit for a lord! A lord? Ah! You shall show money with lords for wagers, and beat ’em!”

In his heat and triumph, and in his knowledge that I had been nearly fainting, he did not remark on my reception of all this. It was the one grain of relief I had.

“Look’ee here!” he went on, taking my watch out of my pocket, and turning towards him a ring on my finger, while I recoiled from his touch as if he had been a snake, “a gold ’un and a beauty: that’s a gentleman’s, I hope! A diamond all set round with rubies; that’s a gentleman’s, I hope! Look at your linen; fine and beautiful! Look at your clothes; better ain’t to be got! And your books too,” turning his eyes round the room, “mounting up, on their shelves, by hundreds! And you read ’em; don’t you? I see you’d been a reading of ’em when I come in. Ha, ha, ha! You shall read ’em to me, dear boy! And if they’re in foreign languages wot I don’t understand, I shall be just as proud as if I did.”

Again he took both my hands and put them to his lips, while my blood ran cold within me.

“Don’t you mind talking, Pip,” said he, after again drawing his sleeve over his eyes and forehead, as the click came in his throat which I well remembered,—and he was all the more horrible to me that he was so much in earnest; “you can’t do better nor keep quiet, dear boy. You ain’t looked slowly forward to this as I have; you wosn’t prepared for this as I wos. But didn’t you never think it might be me?”

“O no, no, no,” I returned, “Never, never!”

“Well, you see it wos me, and single-handed. Never a soul in it but my own self and Mr. Jaggers.”

“Was there no one else?” I asked.

“No,” said he, with a glance of surprise: “who else should there be? And, dear boy, how good looking you have growed! There’s bright eyes somewheres—eh? Isn’t there bright eyes somewheres, wot you love the thoughts on?”

O Estella, Estella!

“They shall be yourn, dear boy, if money can buy ’em. Not that a

gentleman like you, so well set up as you, can't win 'em off of his own game; but money shall back you! Let me finish wot I was a telling you, dear boy. From that there hut and that there hiring-out, I got money left me by my master (which died, and had been the same as me), and got my liberty and went for myself. In every single thing I went for, I went for you. 'Lord strike a blight upon it,' I says, wotever it was I went for, 'if it ain't for him!' It all prospered wonderful. As I giv' you to understand just now, I'm famous for it. It was the money left me, and the gains of the first few year wot I sent home to Mr. Jaggers—all for you—when he first come arter you, agreeable to my letter."

O that he had never come! That he had left me at the forge,—far from contented, yet, by comparison happy!

"And then, dear boy, it was a recompense to me, look'ee here, to know in secret that I was making a gentleman. The blood horses of them colonists might fling up the dust over me as I was walking; what do I say? I says to myself, 'I'm making a better gentleman nor ever you'll be!' When one of 'em says to another, 'He was a convict, a few year ago, and is a ignorant common fellow now, for all he's lucky,' what do I say? I says to myself, 'If I ain't a gentleman, nor yet ain't got no learning, I'm the owner of such. All on you owns stock and land; which on you owns a brought-up London gentleman?' This way I kep myself a going. And this way I held steady afore my mind that I would for certain come one day and see my boy, and make myself known to him, on his own ground."

He laid his hand on my shoulder. I shuddered at the thought that for anything I knew, his hand might be stained with blood.

"It warn't easy, Pip, for me to leave them parts, nor yet it warn't safe. But I held to it, and the harder it was, the stronger I held, for I was determined, and my mind firm made up. At last I done it. Dear boy, I done it!"

I tried to collect my thoughts, but I was stunned. Throughout, I had seemed to myself to attend more to the wind and the rain than to him; even now, I could not separate his voice from those voices, though those were loud and his was silent.

"Where will you put me?" he asked, presently. "I must be put somewheres, dear boy."

"To sleep?" said I.

“Yes. And to sleep long and sound,” he answered; “for I’ve been sea-tossed and sea-washed, months and months.”

“My friend and companion,” said I, rising from the sofa, “is absent; you must have his room.”

“He won’t come back to-morrow; will he?”

“No,” said I, answering almost mechanically, in spite of my utmost efforts; “not to-morrow.”

“Because, look’ee here, dear boy,” he said, dropping his voice, and laying a long finger on my breast in an impressive manner, “caution is necessary.”

“How do you mean? Caution?”

“By G——, it’s Death!”

“What’s death?”

“I was sent for life. It’s death to come back. There’s been overmuch coming back of late years, and I should of a certainty be hanged if took.”

Nothing was needed but this; the wretched man, after loading wretched me with his gold and silver chains for years, had risked his life to come to me, and I held it there in my keeping! If I had loved him instead of abhorring him; if I had been attracted to him by the strongest admiration and affection, instead of shrinking from him with the strongest repugnance; it could have been no worse. On the contrary, it would have been better, for his preservation would then have naturally and tenderly addressed my heart.

My first care was to close the shutters, so that no light might be seen from without, and then to close and make fast the doors. While I did so, he stood at the table drinking rum and eating biscuit; and when I saw him thus engaged, I saw my convict on the marshes at his meal again. It almost seemed to me as if he must stoop down presently, to file at his leg.

When I had gone into Herbert’s room, and had shut off any other communication between it and the staircase than through the room in which our conversation had been held, I asked him if he would go to bed? He said yes, but asked me for some of my “gentleman’s linen” to put on in the morning. I brought it out, and laid it ready for him, and my blood again ran cold when he again took me by both hands to give me good night.

I got away from him, without knowing how I did it, and mended the fire in the room where we had been together, and sat down by it, afraid to go to bed. For an hour or more, I remained too stunned to think; and it was not

until I began to think, that I began fully to know how wrecked I was, and how the ship in which I had sailed was gone to pieces.

Miss Havisham's intentions towards me, all a mere dream; Estella not designed for me; I only suffered in Satis House as a convenience, a sting for the greedy relations, a model with a mechanical heart to practise on when no other practice was at hand; those were the first smarts I had. But, sharpest and deepest pain of all,—it was for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes, and liable to be taken out of those rooms where I sat thinking, and hanged at the Old Bailey door, that I had deserted Joe.

I would not have gone back to Joe now, I would not have gone back to Biddy now, for any consideration; simply, I suppose, because my sense of my own worthless conduct to them was greater than every consideration. No wisdom on earth could have given me the comfort that I should have derived from their simplicity and fidelity; but I could never, never, undo what I had done.

In every rage of wind and rush of rain, I heard pursuers. Twice, I could have sworn there was a knocking and whispering at the outer door. With these fears upon me, I began either to imagine or recall that I had had mysterious warnings of this man's approach. That, for weeks gone by, I had passed faces in the streets which I had thought like his. That these likenesses had grown more numerous, as he, coming over the sea, had drawn nearer. That his wicked spirit had somehow sent these messengers to mine, and that now on this stormy night he was as good as his word, and with me.

Crowding up with these reflections came the reflection that I had seen him with my childish eyes to be a desperately violent man; that I had heard that other convict reiterate that he had tried to murder him; that I had seen him down in the ditch tearing and fighting like a wild beast. Out of such remembrances I brought into the light of the fire a half-formed terror that it might not be safe to be shut up there with him in the dead of the wild solitary night. This dilated until it filled the room, and impelled me to take a candle and go in and look at my dreadful burden.

He had rolled a handkerchief round his head, and his face was set and lowering in his sleep. But he was asleep, and quietly too, though he had a pistol lying on the pillow. Assured of this, I softly removed the key to the outside of his door, and turned it on him before I again sat down by the fire.

Gradually I slipped from the chair and lay on the floor. When I awoke without having parted in my sleep with the perception of my wretchedness, the clocks of the Eastward churches were striking five, the candles were wasted out, the fire was dead, and the wind and rain intensified the thick black darkness.

THIS IS THE END OF THE SECOND STAGE OF PIP’S EXPECTATIONS.

Chapter XL

IT WAS FORTUNATE FOR me that I had to take precautions to ensure (so far as I could) the safety of my dreaded visitor; for, this thought pressing on me when I awoke, held other thoughts in a confused concourse at a distance.

The impossibility of keeping him concealed in the chambers was self-evident. It could not be done, and the attempt to do it would inevitably engender suspicion. True, I had no Avenger in my service now, but I was looked after by an inflammatory old female, assisted by an animated rag-bag whom she called her niece, and to keep a room secret from them would be to invite curiosity and exaggeration. They both had weak eyes, which I had long attributed to their chronically looking in at keyholes, and they were always at hand when not wanted; indeed that was their only reliable quality besides larceny. Not to get up a mystery with these people, I resolved to announce in the morning that my uncle had unexpectedly come from the country.

This course I decided on while I was yet groping about in the darkness for the means of getting a light. Not stumbling on the means after all, I was fain to go out to the adjacent Lodge and get the watchman there to come with his lantern. Now, in groping my way down the black staircase I fell over something, and that something was a man crouching in a corner.

As the man made no answer when I asked him what he did there, but eluded my touch in silence, I ran to the Lodge and urged the watchman to come quickly; telling him of the incident on the way back. The wind being as fierce as ever, we did not care to endanger the light in the lantern by rekindling the extinguished lamps on the staircase, but we examined the staircase from the bottom to the top and found no one there. It then occurred to me as possible that the man might have slipped into my rooms; so, lighting my candle at the watchman’s, and leaving him standing at the door,

I examined them carefully, including the room in which my dreaded guest lay asleep. All was quiet, and assuredly no other man was in those chambers.

It troubled me that there should have been a lurker on the stairs, on that night of all nights in the year, and I asked the watchman, on the chance of eliciting some hopeful explanation as I handed him a dram at the door, whether he had admitted at his gate any gentleman who had perceptibly been dining out? Yes, he said; at different times of the night, three. One lived in Fountain Court, and the other two lived in the Lane, and he had seen them all go home. Again, the only other man who dwelt in the house of which my chambers formed a part had been in the country for some weeks, and he certainly had not returned in the night, because we had seen his door with his seal on it as we came up stairs.

“The night being so bad, sir,” said the watchman, as he gave me back my glass, “uncommon few have come in at my gate. Besides them three gentlemen that I have named, I don’t call to mind another since about eleven o’clock, when a stranger asked for you.”

“My uncle,” I muttered. “Yes.”

“You saw him, sir?”

“Yes. Oh yes.”

“Likewise the person with him?”

“Person with him!” I repeated.

“I judged the person to be with him,” returned the watchman. “The person stopped, when he stopped to make inquiry of me, and the person took this way when he took this way.”

“What sort of person?”

The watchman had not particularly noticed; he should say a working person; to the best of his belief, he had a dust-colored kind of clothes on, under a dark coat. The watchman made more light of the matter than I did, and naturally; not having my reason for attaching weight to it.

When I had got rid of him, which I thought it well to do without prolonging explanations, my mind was much troubled by these two circumstances taken together. Whereas they were easy of innocent solution apart,—as, for instance, some diner out or diner at home, who had not gone near this watchman’s gate, might have strayed to my staircase and dropped asleep there,—and my nameless visitor might have brought some one with

him to show him the way,—still, joined, they had an ugly look to one as prone to distrust and fear as the changes of a few hours had made me.

I lighted my fire, which burnt with a raw pale flare at that time of the morning, and fell into a doze before it. I seemed to have been dozing a whole night when the clocks struck six. As there was full an hour and a half between me and daylight, I dozed again; now, waking up uneasily, with prolix conversations about nothing, in my ears; now, making thunder of the wind in the chimney; at length, falling off into a profound sleep from which the daylight woke me with a start.

All this time I had never been able to consider my own situation, nor could I do so yet. I had not the power to attend to it. I was greatly dejected and distressed, but in an incoherent wholesale sort of way. As to forming any plan for the future, I could as soon have formed an elephant. When I opened the shutters and looked out at the wet wild morning, all of a leaden hue; when I walked from room to room; when I sat down again shivering, before the fire, waiting for my laundress to appear; I thought how miserable I was, but hardly knew why, or how long I had been so, or on what day of the week I made the reflection, or even who I was that made it.

At last, the old woman and the niece came in,—the latter with a head not easily distinguishable from her dusty broom,—and testified surprise at sight of me and the fire. To whom I imparted how my uncle had come in the night and was then asleep, and how the breakfast preparations were to be modified accordingly. Then I washed and dressed while they knocked the furniture about and made a dust; and so, in a sort of dream or sleep-waking, I found myself sitting by the fire again, waiting for—Him—to come to breakfast.

By and by, his door opened and he came out. I could not bring myself to bear the sight of him, and I thought he had a worse look by daylight.

“I do not even know,” said I, speaking low as he took his seat at the table, “by what name to call you. I have given out that you are my uncle.”

“That’s it, dear boy! Call me uncle.”

“You assumed some name, I suppose, on board ship?”

“Yes, dear boy. I took the name of Provis.”

“Do you mean to keep that name?”

“Why, yes, dear boy, it’s as good as another,—unless you’d like another.”

“What is your real name?” I asked him in a whisper.

“Magwitch,” he answered, in the same tone; “chrisen’d Abel.”

“What were you brought up to be?”

“A warmint, dear boy.”

He answered quite seriously, and used the word as if it denoted some profession.

“When you came into the Temple last night—” said I, pausing to wonder whether that could really have been last night, which seemed so long ago.

“Yes, dear boy?”

“When you came in at the gate and asked the watchman the way here, had you any one with you?”

“With me? No, dear boy.”

“But there was some one there?”

“I didn’t take particular notice,” he said, dubiously, “not knowing the ways of the place. But I think there was a person, too, come in alonger me.”

“Are you known in London?”

“I hope not!” said he, giving his neck a jerk with his forefinger that made me turn hot and sick.

“Were you known in London, once?”

“Not over and above, dear boy. I was in the provinces mostly.”

“Were you—tried—in London?”

“Which time?” said he, with a sharp look.

“The last time.”

He nodded. “First knowed Mr. Jaggers that way. Jaggers was for me.”

It was on my lips to ask him what he was tried for, but he took up a knife, gave it a flourish, and with the words, “And what I done is worked out and paid for!” fell to at his breakfast.

He ate in a ravenous way that was very disagreeable, and all his actions were uncouth, noisy, and greedy. Some of his teeth had failed him since I saw him eat on the marshes, and as he turned his food in his mouth, and turned his head sideways to bring his strongest fangs to bear upon it, he looked terribly like a hungry old dog. If I had begun with any appetite, he would have taken it away, and I should have sat much as I did,—repelled from him by an insurmountable aversion, and gloomily looking at the cloth.

“I’m a heavy grubber, dear boy,” he said, as a polite kind of apology when he made an end of his meal, “but I always was. If it had been in my

constitution to be a lighter grubber, I might ha' got into lighter trouble. Similarly, I must have my smoke. When I was first hired out as shepherd t'other side the world, it's my belief I should ha' turned into a molloncolly-mad sheep myself, if I hadn't a had my smoke."

As he said so, he got up from table, and putting his hand into the breast of the pea-coat he wore, brought out a short black pipe, and a handful of loose tobacco of the kind that is called Negro-head. Having filled his pipe, he put the surplus tobacco back again, as if his pocket were a drawer. Then, he took a live coal from the fire with the tongs, and lighted his pipe at it, and then turned round on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, and went through his favorite action of holding out both his hands for mine.

"And this," said he, dandling my hands up and down in his, as he puffed at his pipe,—"and this is the gentleman what I made! The real genuine One! It does me good fur to look at you, Pip. All I stip'late, is, to stand by and look at you, dear boy!"

I released my hands as soon as I could, and found that I was beginning slowly to settle down to the contemplation of my condition. What I was chained to, and how heavily, became intelligible to me, as I heard his hoarse voice, and sat looking up at his furrowed bald head with its iron gray hair at the sides.

"I mustn't see my gentleman a footing it in the mire of the streets; there mustn't be no mud on his boots. My gentleman must have horses, Pip! Horses to ride, and horses to drive, and horses for his servant to ride and drive as well. Shall colonists have their horses (and blood 'uns, if you please, good Lord!) and not my London gentleman? No, no. We'll show 'em another pair of shoes than that, Pip; won't us?"

He took out of his pocket a great thick pocket-book, bursting with papers, and tossed it on the table.

"There's something worth spending in that there book, dear boy. It's yourn. All I've got ain't mine; it's yourn. Don't you be afeerd on it. There's more where that come from. I've come to the old country fur to see my gentleman spend his money like a gentleman. That'll be my pleasure. My pleasure 'ull be fur to see him do it. And blast you all!" he wound up, looking round the room and snapping his fingers once with a loud snap, "blast you every one, from the judge in his wig, to the colonist a stirring up the dust, I'll show a better gentleman than the whole kit on you put

together!”

“Stop!” said I, almost in a frenzy of fear and dislike, “I want to speak to you. I want to know what is to be done. I want to know how you are to be kept out of danger, how long you are going to stay, what projects you have.”

“Look’ee here, Pip,” said he, laying his hand on my arm in a suddenly altered and subdued manner; “first of all, look’ee here. I forgot myself half a minute ago. What I said was low; that’s what it was; low. Look’ee here, Pip. Look over it. I ain’t a going to be low.”

“First,” I resumed, half groaning, “what precautions can be taken against your being recognized and seized?”

“No, dear boy,” he said, in the same tone as before, “that don’t go first. Lowness goes first. I ain’t took so many year to make a gentleman, not without knowing what’s due to him. Look’ee here, Pip. I was low; that’s what I was; low. Look over it, dear boy.”

Some sense of the grimly-ludicrous moved me to a fretful laugh, as I replied, “I have looked over it. In Heaven’s name, don’t harp upon it!”

“Yes, but look’ee here,” he persisted. “Dear boy, I ain’t come so fur, not fur to be low. Now, go on, dear boy. You was a saying—”

“How are you to be guarded from the danger you have incurred?”

“Well, dear boy, the danger ain’t so great. Without I was informed agen, the danger ain’t so much to signify. There’s Jaggers, and there’s Wemmick, and there’s you. Who else is there to inform?”

“Is there no chance person who might identify you in the street?” said I.

“Well,” he returned, “there ain’t many. Nor yet I don’t intend to advertise myself in the newspapers by the name of A.M. come back from Botany Bay; and years have rolled away, and who’s to gain by it? Still, look’ee here, Pip. If the danger had been fifty times as great, I should ha’ come to see you, mind you, just the same.”

“And how long do you remain?”

“How long?” said he, taking his black pipe from his mouth, and dropping his jaw as he stared at me. “I’m not a going back. I’ve come for good.”

“Where are you to live?” said I. “What is to be done with you? Where will you be safe?”

“Dear boy,” he returned, “there’s disguising wigs can be bought for money, and there’s hair powder, and spectacles, and black clothes,—shorts

and what not. Others has done it safe afore, and what others has done afore, others can do agen. As to the where and how of living, dear boy, give me your own opinions on it."

"You take it smoothly now," said I, "but you were very serious last night, when you swore it was Death."

"And so I swear it is Death," said he, putting his pipe back in his mouth, "and Death by the rope, in the open street not fur from this, and it's serious that you should fully understand it to be so. What then, when that's once done? Here I am. To go back now 'ud be as bad as to stand ground—worse. Besides, Pip, I'm here, because I've meant it by you, years and years. As to what I dare, I'm a old bird now, as has dared all manner of traps since first he was fledged, and I'm not afeerd to perch upon a scarecrow. If there's Death hid inside of it, there is, and let him come out, and I'll face him, and then I'll believe in him and not afore. And now let me have a look at my gentleman agen."

Once more, he took me by both hands and surveyed me with an air of admiring proprietorship: smoking with great complacency all the while.

It appeared to me that I could do no better than secure him some quiet lodging hard by, of which he might take possession when Herbert returned: whom I expected in two or three days. That the secret must be confided to Herbert as a matter of unavoidable necessity, even if I could have put the immense relief I should derive from sharing it with him out of the question, was plain to me. But it was by no means so plain to Mr. Provis (I resolved to call him by that name), who reserved his consent to Herbert's participation until he should have seen him and formed a favorable judgment of his physiognomy. "And even then, dear boy," said he, pulling a greasy little clasped black Testament out of his pocket, "we'll have him on his oath."

To state that my terrible patron carried this little black book about the world solely to swear people on in cases of emergency, would be to state what I never quite established; but this I can say, that I never knew him put it to any other use. The book itself had the appearance of having been stolen from some court of justice, and perhaps his knowledge of its antecedents, combined with his own experience in that wise, gave him a reliance on its powers as a sort of legal spell or charm. On this first occasion of his producing it, I recalled how he had made me swear fidelity in the

churchyard long ago, and how he had described himself last night as always swearing to his resolutions in his solitude.

As he was at present dressed in a seafaring slop suit, in which he looked as if he had some parrots and cigars to dispose of, I next discussed with him what dress he should wear. He cherished an extraordinary belief in the virtues of “shorts” as a disguise, and had in his own mind sketched a dress for himself that would have made him something between a dean and a dentist. It was with considerable difficulty that I won him over to the assumption of a dress more like a prosperous farmer’s; and we arranged that he should cut his hair close, and wear a little powder. Lastly, as he had not yet been seen by the laundress or her niece, he was to keep himself out of their view until his change of dress was made.

It would seem a simple matter to decide on these precautions; but in my dazed, not to say distracted, state, it took so long, that I did not get out to further them until two or three in the afternoon. He was to remain shut up in the chambers while I was gone, and was on no account to open the door.

There being to my knowledge a respectable lodging-house in Essex Street, the back of which looked into the Temple, and was almost within hail of my windows, I first of all repaired to that house, and was so fortunate as to secure the second floor for my uncle, Mr. Provis. I then went from shop to shop, making such purchases as were necessary to the change in his appearance. This business transacted, I turned my face, on my own account, to Little Britain. Mr. Jaggers was at his desk, but, seeing me enter, got up immediately and stood before his fire.

“Now, Pip,” said he, “be careful.”

“I will, sir,” I returned. For, coming along I had thought well of what I was going to say.

“Don’t commit yourself,” said Mr. Jaggers, “and don’t commit any one. You understand—any one. Don’t tell me anything: I don’t want to know anything; I am not curious.”

Of course I saw that he knew the man was come.

“I merely want, Mr. Jaggers,” said I, “to assure myself that what I have been told is true. I have no hope of its being untrue, but at least I may verify it.”

Mr. Jaggers nodded. “But did you say ‘told’ or ‘informed’?” he asked me, with his head on one side, and not looking at me, but looking in a

listening way at the floor. “Told would seem to imply verbal communication. You can’t have verbal communication with a man in New South Wales, you know.”

“I will say, informed, Mr. Jaggers.”

“Good.”

“I have been informed by a person named Abel Magwitch, that he is the benefactor so long unknown to me.”

“That is the man,” said Mr. Jaggers, “in New South Wales.”

“And only he?” said I.

“And only he,” said Mr. Jaggers.

“I am not so unreasonable, sir, as to think you at all responsible for my mistakes and wrong conclusions; but I always supposed it was Miss Havisham.”

“As you say, Pip,” returned Mr. Jaggers, turning his eyes upon me coolly, and taking a bite at his forefinger, “I am not at all responsible for that.”

“And yet it looked so like it, sir,” I pleaded with a downcast heart.

“Not a particle of evidence, Pip,” said Mr. Jaggers, shaking his head and gathering up his skirts. “Take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence. There’s no better rule.”

“I have no more to say,” said I, with a sigh, after standing silent for a little while. “I have verified my information, and there’s an end.”

“And Magwitch—in New South Wales—having at last disclosed himself,” said Mr. Jaggers, “you will comprehend, Pip, how rigidly throughout my communication with you, I have always adhered to the strict line of fact. There has never been the least departure from the strict line of fact. You are quite aware of that?”

“Quite, sir.”

“I communicated to Magwitch—in New South Wales—when he first wrote to me—from New South Wales—the caution that he must not expect me ever to deviate from the strict line of fact. I also communicated to him another caution. He appeared to me to have obscurely hinted in his letter at some distant idea he had of seeing you in England here. I cautioned him that I must hear no more of that; that he was not at all likely to obtain a pardon; that he was expatriated for the term of his natural life; and that his presenting himself in this country would be an act of felony, rendering him

liable to the extreme penalty of the law. I gave Magwitch that caution," said Mr. Jaggers, looking hard at me; "I wrote it to New South Wales. He guided himself by it, no doubt."

"No doubt," said I.

"I have been informed by Wemmick," pursued Mr. Jaggers, still looking hard at me, "that he has received a letter, under date Portsmouth, from a colonist of the name of Purvis, or—"

"Or Provis," I suggested.

"Or Provis—thank you, Pip. Perhaps it is Provis? Perhaps you know it's Provis?"

"Yes," said I.

"You know it's Provis. A letter, under date Portsmouth, from a colonist of the name of Provis, asking for the particulars of your address, on behalf of Magwitch. Wemmick sent him the particulars, I understand, by return of post. Probably it is through Provis that you have received the explanation of Magwitch—in New South Wales?"

"It came through Provis," I replied.

"Good day, Pip," said Mr. Jaggers, offering his hand; "glad to have seen you. In writing by post to Magwitch—in New South Wales—or in communicating with him through Provis, have the goodness to mention that the particulars and vouchers of our long account shall be sent to you, together with the balance; for there is still a balance remaining. Good day, Pip!"

We shook hands, and he looked hard at me as long as he could see me. I turned at the door, and he was still looking hard at me, while the two vile casts on the shelf seemed to be trying to get their eyelids open, and to force out of their swollen throats, "O, what a man he is!"

Wemmick was out, and though he had been at his desk he could have done nothing for me. I went straight back to the Temple, where I found the terrible Provis drinking rum and water and smoking negro-head, in safety.

Next day the clothes I had ordered all came home, and he put them on. Whatever he put on, became him less (it dismally seemed to me) than what he had worn before. To my thinking, there was something in him that made it hopeless to attempt to disguise him. The more I dressed him and the better I dressed him, the more he looked like the slouching fugitive on the marshes. This effect on my anxious fancy was partly referable, no doubt, to

his old face and manner growing more familiar to me; but I believe too that he dragged one of his legs as if there were still a weight of iron on it, and that from head to foot there was Convict in the very grain of the man.

The influences of his solitary hut-life were upon him besides, and gave him a savage air that no dress could tame; added to these were the influences of his subsequent branded life among men, and, crowning all, his consciousness that he was dodging and hiding now. In all his ways of sitting and standing, and eating and drinking,—of brooding about in a high-shouldered reluctant style,—of taking out his great horn-handled jackknife and wiping it on his legs and cutting his food,—of lifting light glasses and cups to his lips, as if they were clumsy pannikins,—of chopping a wedge off his bread, and soaking up with it the last fragments of gravy round and round his plate, as if to make the most of an allowance, and then drying his finger-ends on it, and then swallowing it,—in these ways and a thousand other small nameless instances arising every minute in the day, there was Prisoner, Felon, Bondsman, plain as plain could be.

It had been his own idea to wear that touch of powder, and I had conceded the powder after overcoming the shorts. But I can compare the effect of it, when on, to nothing but the probable effect of rouge upon the dead; so awful was the manner in which everything in him that it was most desirable to repress, started through that thin layer of pretence, and seemed to come blazing out at the crown of his head. It was abandoned as soon as tried, and he wore his grizzled hair cut short.

Words cannot tell what a sense I had, at the same time, of the dreadful mystery that he was to me. When he fell asleep of an evening, with his knotted hands clenching the sides of the easy-chair, and his bald head tattooed with deep wrinkles falling forward on his breast, I would sit and look at him, wondering what he had done, and loading him with all the crimes in the Calendar, until the impulse was powerful on me to start up and fly from him. Every hour so increased my abhorrence of him, that I even think I might have yielded to this impulse in the first agonies of being so haunted, notwithstanding all he had done for me and the risk he ran, but for the knowledge that Herbert must soon come back. Once, I actually did start out of bed in the night, and begin to dress myself in my worst clothes, hurriedly intending to leave him there with everything else I possessed, and enlist for India as a private soldier.

I doubt if a ghost could have been more terrible to me, up in those lonely rooms in the long evenings and long nights, with the wind and the rain always rushing by. A ghost could not have been taken and hanged on my account, and the consideration that he could be, and the dread that he would be, were no small addition to my horrors. When he was not asleep, or playing a complicated kind of Patience with a ragged pack of cards of his own,—a game that I never saw before or since, and in which he recorded his winnings by sticking his jackknife into the table,—when he was not engaged in either of these pursuits, he would ask me to read to him, —"Foreign language, dear boy!" While I complied, he, not comprehending a single word, would stand before the fire surveying me with the air of an Exhibitor, and I would see him, between the fingers of the hand with which I shaded my face, appealing in dumb show to the furniture to take notice of my proficiency. The imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made, was not more wretched than I, pursued by the creature who had made me, and recoiling from him with a stronger repulsion, the more he admired me and the fonder he was of me.

This is written of, I am sensible, as if it had lasted a year. It lasted about five days. Expecting Herbert all the time, I dared not go out, except when I took Provis for an airing after dark. At length, one evening when dinner was over and I had dropped into a slumber quite worn out,—for my nights had been agitated and my rest broken by fearful dreams,—I was roused by the welcome footstep on the staircase. Provis, who had been asleep too, staggered up at the noise I made, and in an instant I saw his jackknife shining in his hand.

"Quiet! It's Herbert!" I said; and Herbert came bursting in, with the airy freshness of six hundred miles of France upon him.

"Handel, my dear fellow, how are you, and again how are you, and again how are you? I seem to have been gone a twelvemonth! Why, so I must have been, for you have grown quite thin and pale! Handel, my—Halloa! I beg your pardon."

He was stopped in his running on and in his shaking hands with me, by seeing Provis. Provis, regarding him with a fixed attention, was slowly putting up his jackknife, and groping in another pocket for something else.

"Herbert, my dear friend," said I, shutting the double doors, while Herbert stood staring and wondering, "something very strange has

happened. This is—a visitor of mine."

"It's all right, dear boy!" said Provis coming forward, with his little clasped black book, and then addressing himself to Herbert. "Take it in your right hand. Lord strike you dead on the spot, if ever you split in any way sumever! Kiss it!"

"Do so, as he wishes it," I said to Herbert. So, Herbert, looking at me with a friendly uneasiness and amazement, complied, and Provis immediately shaking hands with him, said, "Now you're on your oath, you know. And never believe me on mine, if Pip shan't make a gentleman on you!"

Chapter XLI

IN VAIN SHOULD I attempt to describe the astonishment and disquiet of Herbert, when he and I and Provis sat down before the fire, and I recounted the whole of the secret. Enough, that I saw my own feelings reflected in Herbert's face, and not least among them, my repugnance towards the man who had done so much for me.

What would alone have set a division between that man and us, if there had been no other dividing circumstance, was his triumph in my story. Saving his troublesome sense of having been "low" on one occasion since his return,—on which point he began to hold forth to Herbert, the moment my revelation was finished,—he had no perception of the possibility of my finding any fault with my good fortune. His boast that he had made me a gentleman, and that he had come to see me support the character on his ample resources, was made for me quite as much as for himself. And that it was a highly agreeable boast to both of us, and that we must both be very proud of it, was a conclusion quite established in his own mind.

"Though, look'ee here, Pip's comrade," he said to Herbert, after having discoursed for some time, "I know very well that once since I come back—for half a minute—I've been low. I said to Pip, I knowed as I had been low. But don't you fret yourself on that score. I ain't made Pip a gentleman, and Pip ain't a going to make you a gentleman, not fur me not to know what's due to ye both. Dear boy, and Pip's comrade, you two may count upon me always having a gen-teel muzzle on. Muzzled I have been since that half a minute when I was betrayed into lowness, muzzled I am at the present time, muzzled I ever will be."

Herbert said, "Certainly," but looked as if there were no specific consolation in this, and remained perplexed and dismayed. We were anxious for the time when he would go to his lodging and leave us together,

but he was evidently jealous of leaving us together, and sat late. It was midnight before I took him round to Essex Street, and saw him safely in at his own dark door. When it closed upon him, I experienced the first moment of relief I had known since the night of his arrival.

Never quite free from an uneasy remembrance of the man on the stairs, I had always looked about me in taking my guest out after dark, and in bringing him back; and I looked about me now. Difficult as it is in a large city to avoid the suspicion of being watched, when the mind is conscious of danger in that regard, I could not persuade myself that any of the people within sight cared about my movements. The few who were passing passed on their several ways, and the street was empty when I turned back into the Temple. Nobody had come out at the gate with us, nobody went in at the gate with me. As I crossed by the fountain, I saw his lighted back windows looking bright and quiet, and, when I stood for a few moments in the doorway of the building where I lived, before going up the stairs, Garden Court was as still and lifeless as the staircase was when I ascended it.

Herbert received me with open arms, and I had never felt before so blessedly what it is to have a friend. When he had spoken some sound words of sympathy and encouragement, we sat down to consider the question, What was to be done?

The chair that Provis had occupied still remaining where it had stood,—for he had a barrack way with him of hanging about one spot, in one unsettled manner, and going through one round of observances with his pipe and his negro-head and his jackknife and his pack of cards, and what not, as if it were all put down for him on a slate,—I say his chair remaining where it had stood, Herbert unconsciously took it, but next moment started out of it, pushed it away, and took another. He had no occasion to say after that that he had conceived an aversion for my patron, neither had I occasion to confess my own. We interchanged that confidence without shaping a syllable.

“What,” said I to Herbert, when he was safe in another chair,—“what is to be done?”

“My poor dear Handel,” he replied, holding his head, “I am too stunned to think.”

“So was I, Herbert, when the blow first fell. Still, something must be done. He is intent upon various new expenses,—horses, and carriages, and

lavish appearances of all kinds. He must be stopped somehow."

"You mean that you can't accept—"

"How can I?" I interposed, as Herbert paused. "Think of him! Look at him!"

An involuntary shudder passed over both of us.

"Yet I am afraid the dreadful truth is, Herbert, that he is attached to me, strongly attached to me. Was there ever such a fate!"

"My poor dear Handel," Herbert repeated.

"Then," said I, "after all, stopping short here, never taking another penny from him, think what I owe him already! Then again: I am heavily in debt, —very heavily for me, who have now no expectations,—and I have been bred to no calling, and I am fit for nothing."

"Well, well, well!" Herbert remonstrated. "Don't say fit for nothing."

"What am I fit for? I know only one thing that I am fit for, and that is, to go for a soldier. And I might have gone, my dear Herbert, but for the prospect of taking counsel with your friendship and affection."

Of course I broke down there: and of course Herbert, beyond seizing a warm grip of my hand, pretended not to know it.

"Anyhow, my dear Handel," said he presently, "soldiering won't do. If you were to renounce this patronage and these favors, I suppose you would do so with some faint hope of one day repaying what you have already had. Not very strong, that hope, if you went soldiering! Besides, it's absurd. You would be infinitely better in Clarriker's house, small as it is. I am working up towards a partnership, you know."

Poor fellow! He little suspected with whose money.

"But there is another question," said Herbert. "This is an ignorant, determined man, who has long had one fixed idea. More than that, he seems to me (I may misjudge him) to be a man of a desperate and fierce character."

"I know he is," I returned. "Let me tell you what evidence I have seen of it." And I told him what I had not mentioned in my narrative, of that encounter with the other convict.

"See, then," said Herbert; "think of this! He comes here at the peril of his life, for the realization of his fixed idea. In the moment of realization, after all his toil and waiting, you cut the ground from under his feet, destroy his idea, and make his gains worthless to him. Do you see nothing that he

might do, under the disappointment?”

“I have seen it, Herbert, and dreamed of it, ever since the fatal night of his arrival. Nothing has been in my thoughts so distinctly as his putting himself in the way of being taken.”

“Then you may rely upon it,” said Herbert, “that there would be great danger of his doing it. That is his power over you as long as he remains in England, and that would be his reckless course if you forsook him.”

I was so struck by the horror of this idea, which had weighed upon me from the first, and the working out of which would make me regard myself, in some sort, as his murderer, that I could not rest in my chair, but began pacing to and fro. I said to Herbert, meanwhile, that even if Provis were recognized and taken, in spite of himself, I should be wretched as the cause, however innocently. Yes; even though I was so wretched in having him at large and near me, and even though I would far rather have worked at the forge all the days of my life than I would ever have come to this!

But there was no staving off the question, What was to be done?

“The first and the main thing to be done,” said Herbert, “is to get him out of England. You will have to go with him, and then he may be induced to go.”

“But get him where I will, could I prevent his coming back?”

“My good Handel, is it not obvious that with Newgate in the next street, there must be far greater hazard in your breaking your mind to him and making him reckless, here, than elsewhere. If a pretext to get him away could be made out of that other convict, or out of anything else in his life, now.”

“There, again!” said I, stopping before Herbert, with my open hands held out, as if they contained the desperation of the case. “I know nothing of his life. It has almost made me mad to sit here of a night and see him before me, so bound up with my fortunes and misfortunes, and yet so unknown to me, except as the miserable wretch who terrified me two days in my childhood!”

Herbert got up, and linked his arm in mine, and we slowly walked to and fro together, studying the carpet.

“Handel,” said Herbert, stopping, “you feel convinced that you can take no further benefits from him; do you?”

“Fully. Surely you would, too, if you were in my place?”

“And you feel convinced that you must break with him?”

“Herbert, can you ask me?”

“And you have, and are bound to have, that tenderness for the life he has risked on your account, that you must save him, if possible, from throwing it away. Then you must get him out of England before you stir a finger to extricate yourself. That done, extricate yourself, in Heaven’s name, and we’ll see it out together, dear old boy.”

It was a comfort to shake hands upon it, and walk up and down again, with only that done.

“Now, Herbert,” said I, “with reference to gaining some knowledge of his history. There is but one way that I know of. I must ask him point blank.”

“Yes. Ask him,” said Herbert, “when we sit at breakfast in the morning.” For he had said, on taking leave of Herbert, that he would come to breakfast with us.

With this project formed, we went to bed. I had the wildest dreams concerning him, and woke unrefreshed; I woke, too, to recover the fear which I had lost in the night, of his being found out as a returned transport. Waking, I never lost that fear.

He came round at the appointed time, took out his jackknife, and sat down to his meal. He was full of plans “for his gentleman’s coming out strong, and like a gentleman,” and urged me to begin speedily upon the pocket-book which he had left in my possession. He considered the chambers and his own lodging as temporary residences, and advised me to look out at once for a “fashionable crib” near Hyde Park, in which he could have “a shake-down.” When he had made an end of his breakfast, and was wiping his knife on his leg, I said to him, without a word of preface,—

“After you were gone last night, I told my friend of the struggle that the soldiers found you engaged in on the marshes, when we came up. You remember?”

“Remember!” said he. “I think so!”

“We want to know something about that man—and about you. It is strange to know no more about either, and particularly you, than I was able to tell last night. Is not this as good a time as another for our knowing more?”

“Well!” he said, after consideration. “You’re on your oath, you know,

Pip’s comrade?”

“Assuredly,” replied Herbert.

“As to anything I say, you know,” he insisted. “The oath applies to all.”

“I understand it to do so.”

“And look’ee here! Wotever I done is worked out and paid for,” he insisted again.

“So be it.”

He took out his black pipe and was going to fill it with negro-head, when, looking at the tangle of tobacco in his hand, he seemed to think it might perplex the thread of his narrative. He put it back again, stuck his pipe in a button-hole of his coat, spread a hand on each knee, and after turning an angry eye on the fire for a few silent moments, looked round at us and said what follows.

Chapter XLII

“DEAR BOY AND PIP’S comrade. I am not a going fur to tell you my life like a song, or a story-book. But to give it you short and handy, I’ll put it at once into a mouthful of English. In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail. There, you’ve got it. That’s my life pretty much, down to such times as I got shipped off, arter Pip stood my friend.

“I’ve been done everything to, pretty well—except hanged. I’ve been locked up as much as a silver tea-kittle. I’ve been carted here and carted there, and put out of this town, and put out of that town, and stuck in the stocks, and whipped and worried and drove. I’ve no more notion where I was born than you have—if so much. I first become aware of myself down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living. Summun had run away from me—a man—a tinker—and he’d took the fire with him, and left me wery cold.

“I know’d my name to be Magwitch, chrisen’d Abel. How did I know it? Much as I know’d the birds’ names in the hedges to be chaffinch, sparrer, thrush. I might have thought it was all lies together, only as the birds’ names come out true, I supposed mine did.

“So fur as I could find, there warn’t a soul that see young Abel Magwitch, with us little on him as in him, but wot caught fright at him, and either drove him off, or took him up. I was took up, took up, took up, to that extent that I reg’larly grow’d up took up.

“This is the way it was, that when I was a ragged little creetur as much to be pitied as ever I see (not that I looked in the glass, for there warn’t many insides of furnished houses known to me), I got the name of being hardened. ‘This is a terrible hardened one,’ they says to prison wisitors, picking out me. ‘May be said to live in jails, this boy.’ Then they looked at me, and I looked at them, and they measured my head, some on ’em,—they had better a measured my stomach,—and others on ’em giv me tracts what I

couldn’t read, and made me speeches what I couldn’t understand. They always went on agen me about the Devil. But what the Devil was I to do? I must put something into my stomach, mustn’t I?— Howsomever, I’m a getting low, and I know what’s due. Dear boy and Pip’s comrade, don’t you be afeerd of me being low.

“Tramping, begging, thieving, working sometimes when I could,—though that warn’t as often as you may think, till you put the question whether you would ha’ been over-ready to give me work yourselves,—a bit of a poacher, a bit of a laborer, a bit of a wagoner, a bit of a haymaker, a bit of a hawker, a bit of most things that don’t pay and lead to trouble, I got to be a man. A deserting soldier in a Traveller’s Rest, what lay hid up to the chin under a lot of taturs, learnt me to read; and a travelling Giant what signed his name at a penny a time learnt me to write. I warn’t locked up as often now as formerly, but I wore out my good share of key-metal still.

“At Epsom races, a matter of over twenty years ago, I got acquainted wi’ a man whose skull I’d crack wi’ this poker, like the claw of a lobster, if I’d got it on this hob. His right name was Compeyson; and that’s the man, dear boy, what you see me a pounding in the ditch, according to what you truly told your comrade arter I was gone last night.

“He set up fur a gentleman, this Compeyson, and he’d been to a public boarding-school and had learning. He was a smooth one to talk, and was a dab at the ways of gentlefolks. He was good-looking too. It was the night afore the great race, when I found him on the heath, in a booth that I know’d on. Him and some more was a sitting among the tables when I went in, and the landlord (which had a knowledge of me, and was a sporting one) called him out, and said, ‘I think this is a man that might suit you,’—meaning I was.

“Compeyson, he looks at me very noticing, and I look at him. He has a watch and a chain and a ring and a breast-pin and a handsome suit of clothes.

“‘To judge from appearances, you’re out of luck,’ says Compeyson to me.

“‘Yes, master, and I’ve never been in it much.’ (I had come out of Kingston Jail last on a vagrancy committal. Not but what it might have been for something else; but it warn’t.)

“‘Luck changes,’ says Compeyson; ‘perhaps yours is going to change.’

“I says, ‘I hope it may be so. There’s room.’

“‘What can you do?’ says Compeyson.

“‘Eat and drink,’ I says; ‘if you’ll find the materials.’

“Compeyson laughed, looked at me again very noticing, giv me five shillings, and appointed me for next night. Same place.

“I went to Compeyson next night, same place, and Compeyson took me on to be his man and pardner. And what was Compeyson’s business in which we was to go pardners? Compeyson’s business was the swindling, handwriting forging, stolen bank-note passing, and such-like. All sorts of traps as Compeyson could set with his head, and keep his own legs out of and get the profits from and let another man in for, was Compeyson’s business. He’d no more heart than a iron file, he was as cold as death, and he had the head of the Devil afore mentioned.

“There was another in with Compeyson, as was called Arthur,—not as being so chrisen’d, but as a surname. He was in a Decline, and was a shadow to look at. Him and Compeyson had been in a bad thing with a rich lady some years afore, and they’d made a pot of money by it; but Compeyson betted and gamed, and he’d have run through the king’s taxes. So, Arthur was a dying, and a dying poor and with the horrors on him, and Compeyson’s wife (which Compeyson kicked mostly) was a having pity on him when she could, and Compeyson was a having pity on nothing and nobody.

“I might a took warning by Arthur, but I didn’t; and I won’t pretend I was partick’ler—for where ’ud be the good on it, dear boy and comrade? So I begun wi’ Compeyson, and a poor tool I was in his hands. Arthur lived at the top of Compeyson’s house (over nigh Brentford it was), and Compeyson kept a careful account agen him for board and lodging, in case he should ever get better to work it out. But Arthur soon settled the account. The second or third time as ever I see him, he come a tearing down into Compeyson’s parlor late at night, in only a flannel gown, with his hair all in a sweat, and he says to Compeyson’s wife, ‘Sally, she really is up stairs alonger me, now, and I can’t get rid of her. She’s all in white,’ he says, ‘wi’ white flowers in her hair, and she’s awful mad, and she’s got a shroud hanging over her arm, and she says she’ll put it on me at five in the morning.’

“Says Compeyson: ‘Why, you fool, don’t you know she’s got a living

body? And how should she be up there, without coming through the door, or in at the window, and up the stairs?'

"'I don't know how she's there,' says Arthur, shivering dreadful with the horrors, 'but she's standing in the corner at the foot of the bed, awful mad. And over where her heart's broke—you broke it!—there's drops of blood.'

"Compeyson spoke hardy, but he was always a coward. 'Go up alonger this drivelling sick man,' he says to his wife, 'and Magwitch, lend her a hand, will you?' But he never come nigh himself.

"Compeyson's wife and me took him up to bed agen, and he raved most dreadful. 'Why look at her!' he cries out. 'She's a shaking the shroud at me! Don't you see her? Look at her eyes! Ain't it awful to see her so mad?' Next he cries, 'She'll put it on me, and then I'm done for! Take it away from her, take it away!' And then he catched hold of us, and kep on a talking to her, and answering of her, till I half believed I see her myself.

"Compeyson's wife, being used to him, giv him some liquor to get the horrors off, and by and by he quieted. 'O, she's gone! Has her keeper been for her?' he says. 'Yes,' says Compeyson's wife. 'Did you tell him to lock her and bar her in?' 'Yes.' 'And to take that ugly thing away from her?' 'Yes, yes, all right.' 'You're a good creetur,' he says, 'don't leave me, whatever you do, and thank you!'

"He rested pretty quiet till it might want a few minutes of five, and then he starts up with a scream, and screams out, 'Here she is! She's got the shroud again. She's unfolding it. She's coming out of the corner. She's coming to the bed. Hold me, both on you—one of each side—don't let her touch me with it. Hah! she missed me that time. Don't let her throw it over my shoulders. Don't let her lift me up to get it round me. She's lifting me up. Keep me down!' Then he lifted himself up hard, and was dead.

"Compeyson took it easy as a good riddance for both sides. Him and me was soon busy, and first he swore me (being ever artful) on my own book, —this here little black book, dear boy, what I swore your comrade on.

"Not to go into the things that Compeyson planned, and I done—which 'ud take a week—I'll simply say to you, dear boy, and Pip's comrade, that that man got me into such nets as made me his black slave. I was always in debt to him, always under his thumb, always a working, always a getting into danger. He was younger than me, but he'd got craft, and he'd got learning, and he overmatched me five hundred times told and no mercy. My

Missis as I had the hard time wi'— Stop though! I ain't brought her in—"

He looked about him in a confused way, as if he had lost his place in the book of his remembrance; and he turned his face to the fire, and spread his hands broader on his knees, and lifted them off and put them on again.

"There ain't no need to go into it," he said, looking round once more. "The time wi' Compeyson was a'most as hard a time as ever I had; that said, all's said. Did I tell you as I was tried, alone, for misdemeanor, while with Compeyson?"

I answered, No.

"Well!" he said, "I was, and got convicted. As to took up on suspicion, that was twice or three times in the four or five year that it lasted; but evidence was wanting. At last, me and Compeyson was both committed for felony,—on a charge of putting stolen notes in circulation,—and there was other charges behind. Compeyson says to me, 'Separate defences, no communication,' and that was all. And I was so miserable poor, that I sold all the clothes I had, except what hung on my back, afore I could get Jaggers.

"When we was put in the dock, I noticed first of all what a gentleman Compeyson looked, wi' his curly hair and his black clothes and his white pocket-handkercher, and what a common sort of a wretch I looked. When the prosecution opened and the evidence was put short, aforehand, I noticed how heavy it all bore on me, and how light on him. When the evidence was giv in the box, I noticed how it was always me that had come for'ard, and could be swore to, how it was always me that the money had been paid to, how it was always me that had seemed to work the thing and get the profit. But when the defence come on, then I see the plan plainer; for, says the counsellor for Compeyson, 'My lord and gentlemen, here you has afore you, side by side, two persons as your eyes can separate wide; one, the younger, well brought up, who will be spoke to as such; one, the elder, ill brought up, who will be spoke to as such; one, the younger, seldom if ever seen in these here transactions, and only suspected; t'other, the elder, always seen in 'em and always wi' his guilt brought home. Can you doubt, if there is but one in it, which is the one, and, if there is two in it, which is much the worst one?' And such-like. And when it come to character, warn't it Compeyson as had been to the school, and warn't it his schoolfellows as was in this position and in that, and warn't it him as had been know'd by

witnesses in such clubs and societies, and nowt to his disadvantage? And warn't it me as had been tried afore, and as had been know'd up hill and down dale in Bridewells and Lock-Ups! And when it come to speech-making, warn't it Compeyson as could speak to 'em wi' his face dropping every now and then into his white pocket-handkercher,—ah! and wi' verses in his speech, too,—and warn't it me as could only say, 'Gentlemen, this man at my side is a most precious rascal'? And when the verdict come, warn't it Compeyson as was recommended to mercy on account of good character and bad company, and giving up all the information he could agen me, and warn't it me as got never a word but Guilty? And when I says to Compeyson, 'Once out of this court, I'll smash that face of yourn!' ain't it Compeyson as prays the Judge to be protected, and gets two turnkeys stood betwixt us? And when we're sentenced, ain't it him as gets seven year, and me fourteen, and ain't it him as the Judge is sorry for, because he might a done so well, and ain't it me as the Judge perceives to be a old offender of wiolent passion, likely to come to worse?"

He had worked himself into a state of great excitement, but he checked it, took two or three short breaths, swallowed as often, and stretching out his hand towards me said, in a reassuring manner, "I ain't a going to be low, dear boy!"

He had so heated himself that he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face and head and neck and hands, before he could go on.

"I had said to Compeyson that I'd smash that face of his, and I swore Lord smash mine! to do it. We was in the same prison-ship, but I couldn't get at him for long, though I tried. At last I come behind him and hit him on the cheek to turn him round and get a smashing one at him, when I was seen and seized. The black-hole of that ship warn't a strong one, to a judge of black-holes that could swim and dive. I escaped to the shore, and I was a hiding among the graves there, envying them as was in 'em and all over, when I first see my boy!"

He regarded me with a look of affection that made him almost abhorrent to me again, though I had felt great pity for him.

"By my boy, I was giv to understand as Compeyson was out on them marshes too. Upon my soul, I half believe he escaped in his terror, to get quit of me, not knowing it was me as had got ashore. I hunted him down. I smashed his face. 'And now,' says I 'as the worst thing I can do, caring

nothing for myself, I'll drag you back.' And I'd have swum off, towing him by the hair, if it had come to that, and I'd a got him aboard without the soldiers.

"Of course he'd much the best of it to the last,—his character was so good. He had escaped when he was made half wild by me and my murderous intentions; and his punishment was light. I was put in irons, brought to trial again, and sent for life. I didn't stop for life, dear boy and Pip's comrade, being here."

He wiped himself again, as he had done before, and then slowly took his tangle of tobacco from his pocket, and plucked his pipe from his button-hole, and slowly filled it, and began to smoke.

"Is he dead?" I asked, after a silence.

"Is who dead, dear boy?"

"Compeyson."

"He hopes I am, if he's alive, you may be sure," with a fierce look. "I never heerd no more of him."

Herbert had been writing with his pencil in the cover of a book. He softly pushed the book over to me, as Provis stood smoking with his eyes on the fire, and I read in it:—

"Young Havisham's name was Arthur. Compeyson is the man who professed to be Miss Havisham's lover."

I shut the book and nodded slightly to Herbert, and put the book by; but we neither of us said anything, and both looked at Provis as he stood smoking by the fire.

Chapter XLIII

WHY SHOULD I PAUSE to ask how much of my shrinking from Provis might be traced to Estella? Why should I loiter on my road, to compare the state of mind in which I had tried to rid myself of the stain of the prison before meeting her at the coach-office, with the state of mind in which I now reflected on the abyss between Estella in her pride and beauty, and the returned transport whom I harbored? The road would be none the smoother for it, the end would be none the better for it, he would not be helped, nor I extenuated.

A new fear had been engendered in my mind by his narrative; or rather, his narrative had given form and purpose to the fear that was already there. If Compeyson were alive and should discover his return, I could hardly doubt the consequence. That Compeyson stood in mortal fear of him, neither of the two could know much better than I; and that any such man as that man had been described to be would hesitate to release himself for good from a dreaded enemy by the safe means of becoming an informer was scarcely to be imagined.

Never had I breathed, and never would I breathe—or so I resolved—a word of Estella to Provis. But, I said to Herbert that, before I could go abroad, I must see both Estella and Miss Havisham. This was when we were left alone on the night of the day when Provis told us his story. I resolved to go out to Richmond next day, and I went.

On my presenting myself at Mrs. Brandley's, Estella's maid was called to tell that Estella had gone into the country. Where? To Satis House, as usual. Not as usual, I said, for she had never yet gone there without me; when was she coming back? There was an air of reservation in the answer which increased my perplexity, and the answer was, that her maid believed she was only coming back at all for a little while. I could make nothing of

this, except that it was meant that I should make nothing of it, and I went home again in complete discomfiture.

Another night consultation with Herbert after Provis was gone home (I always took him home, and always looked well about me), led us to the conclusion that nothing should be said about going abroad until I came back from Miss Havisham's. In the mean time, Herbert and I were to consider separately what it would be best to say; whether we should devise any pretence of being afraid that he was under suspicious observation; or whether I, who had never yet been abroad, should propose an expedition. We both knew that I had but to propose anything, and he would consent. We agreed that his remaining many days in his present hazard was not to be thought of.

Next day I had the meanness to feign that I was under a binding promise to go down to Joe; but I was capable of almost any meanness towards Joe or his name. Provis was to be strictly careful while I was gone, and Herbert was to take the charge of him that I had taken. I was to be absent only one night, and, on my return, the gratification of his impatience for my starting as a gentleman on a greater scale was to be begun. It occurred to me then, and as I afterwards found to Herbert also, that he might be best got away across the water, on that pretence,—as, to make purchases, or the like.

Having thus cleared the way for my expedition to Miss Havisham's, I set off by the early morning coach before it was yet light, and was out on the open country road when the day came creeping on, halting and whimpering and shivering, and wrapped in patches of cloud and rags of mist, like a beggar. When we drove up to the Blue Boar after a drizzly ride, whom should I see come out under the gateway, toothpick in hand, to look at the coach, but Bentley Drummle!

As he pretended not to see me, I pretended not to see him. It was a very lame pretence on both sides; the lamer, because we both went into the coffee-room, where he had just finished his breakfast, and where I ordered mine. It was poisonous to me to see him in the town, for I very well knew why he had come there.

Pretending to read a smeary newspaper long out of date, which had nothing half so legible in its local news, as the foreign matter of coffee, pickles, fish sauces, gravy, melted butter, and wine with which it was sprinkled all over, as if it had taken the measles in a highly irregular form, I

sat at my table while he stood before the fire. By degrees it became an enormous injury to me that he stood before the fire. And I got up, determined to have my share of it. I had to put my hand behind his legs for the poker when I went up to the fireplace to stir the fire, but still pretended not to know him.

“Is this a cut?” said Mr. Drummle.

“Oh!” said I, poker in hand; “it’s you, is it? How do you do? I was wondering who it was, who kept the fire off.”

With that, I poked tremendously, and having done so, planted myself side by side with Mr. Drummle, my shoulders squared and my back to the fire.

“You have just come down?” said Mr. Drummle, edging me a little away with his shoulder.

“Yes,” said I, edging him a little away with my shoulder.

“Beastly place,” said Drummle. “Your part of the country, I think?”

“Yes,” I assented. “I am told it’s very like your Shropshire.”

“Not in the least like it,” said Drummle.

Here Mr. Drummle looked at his boots and I looked at mine, and then Mr. Drummle looked at my boots, and I looked at his.

“Have you been here long?” I asked, determined not to yield an inch of the fire.

“Long enough to be tired of it,” returned Drummle, pretending to yawn, but equally determined.

“Do you stay here long?”

“Can’t say,” answered Mr. Drummle. “Do you?”

“Can’t say,” said I.

I felt here, through a tingling in my blood, that if Mr. Drummle’s shoulder had claimed another hair’s breadth of room, I should have jerked him into the window; equally, that if my own shoulder had urged a similar claim, Mr. Drummle would have jerked me into the nearest box. He whistled a little. So did I.

“Large tract of marshes about here, I believe?” said Drummle.

“Yes. What of that?” said I.

Mr. Drummle looked at me, and then at my boots, and then said, “Oh!” and laughed.

“Are you amused, Mr. Drummle?”

“No,” said he, “not particularly. I am going out for a ride in the saddle. I mean to explore those marshes for amusement. Out-of-the-way villages there, they tell me. Curious little public-houses—and smithies—and that. Waiter!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Is that horse of mine ready?”

“Brought round to the door, sir.”

“I say. Look here, you sir. The lady won’t ride to-day; the weather won’t do.”

“Very good, sir.”

“And I don’t dine, because I’m going to dine at the lady’s.”

“Very good, sir.”

Then, Drummle glanced at me, with an insolent triumph on his great-jowled face that cut me to the heart, dull as he was, and so exasperated me, that I felt inclined to take him in my arms (as the robber in the story-book is said to have taken the old lady) and seat him on the fire.

One thing was manifest to both of us, and that was, that until relief came, neither of us could relinquish the fire. There we stood, well squared up before it, shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot, with our hands behind us, not budging an inch. The horse was visible outside in the drizzle at the door, my breakfast was put on the table, Drummle’s was cleared away, the waiter invited me to begin, I nodded, we both stood our ground.

“Have you been to the Grove since?” said Drummle.

“No,” said I, “I had quite enough of the Finches the last time I was there.”

“Was that when we had a difference of opinion?”

“Yes,” I replied, very shortly.

“Come, come! They let you off easily enough,” sneered Drummle. “You shouldn’t have lost your temper.”

“Mr. Drummle,” said I, “you are not competent to give advice on that subject. When I lose my temper (not that I admit having done so on that occasion), I don’t throw glasses.”

“I do,” said Drummle.

After glancing at him once or twice, in an increased state of smouldering ferocity, I said,—

“Mr. Drummle, I did not seek this conversation, and I don’t think it an

agreeable one."

"I am sure it's not," said he, superciliously over his shoulder; "I don't think anything about it."

"And therefore," I went on, "with your leave, I will suggest that we hold no kind of communication in future."

"Quite my opinion," said Drummle, "and what I should have suggested myself, or done—more likely—without suggesting. But don't lose your temper. Haven't you lost enough without that?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Waiter!" said Drummle, by way of answering me.

The waiter reappeared.

"Look here, you sir. You quite understand that the young lady don't ride to-day, and that I dine at the young lady's?"

"Quite so, sir!"

When the waiter had felt my fast-cooling teapot with the palm of his hand, and had looked imploringly at me, and had gone out, Drummle, careful not to move the shoulder next me, took a cigar from his pocket and bit the end off, but showed no sign of stirring. Choking and boiling as I was, I felt that we could not go a word further, without introducing Estella's name, which I could not endure to hear him utter; and therefore I looked stonily at the opposite wall, as if there were no one present, and forced myself to silence. How long we might have remained in this ridiculous position it is impossible to say, but for the incursion of three thriving farmers—laid on by the waiter, I think—who came into the coffee-room unbuttoning their great-coats and rubbing their hands, and before whom, as they charged at the fire, we were obliged to give way.

I saw him through the window, seizing his horse's mane, and mounting in his blundering brutal manner, and sidling and backing away. I thought he was gone, when he came back, calling for a light for the cigar in his mouth, which he had forgotten. A man in a dust-colored dress appeared with what was wanted,—I could not have said from where: whether from the inn yard, or the street, or where not,—and as Drummle leaned down from the saddle and lighted his cigar and laughed, with a jerk of his head towards the coffee-room windows, the slouching shoulders and ragged hair of this man whose back was towards me reminded me of Orlick.

Too heavily out of sorts to care much at the time whether it were he or

no, or after all to touch the breakfast, I washed the weather and the journey from my face and hands, and went out to the memorable old house that it would have been so much the better for me never to have entered, never to have seen.

Chapter XLIV

IN THE ROOM WHERE the dressing-table stood, and where the wax-candles burnt on the wall, I found Miss Havisham and Estella; Miss Havisham seated on a settee near the fire, and Estella on a cushion at her feet. Estella was knitting, and Miss Havisham was looking on. They both raised their eyes as I went in, and both saw an alteration in me. I derived that, from the look they interchanged.

"And what wind," said Miss Havisham, "blows you here, Pip?"

Though she looked steadily at me, I saw that she was rather confused. Estella, pausing a moment in her knitting with her eyes upon me, and then going on, I fancied that I read in the action of her fingers, as plainly as if she had told me in the dumb alphabet, that she perceived I had discovered my real benefactor.

"Miss Havisham," said I, "I went to Richmond yesterday, to speak to Estella; and finding that some wind had blown her here, I followed."

Miss Havisham motioning to me for the third or fourth time to sit down, I took the chair by the dressing-table, which I had often seen her occupy. With all that ruin at my feet and about me, it seemed a natural place for me, that day.

"What I had to say to Estella, Miss Havisham, I will say before you, presently—in a few moments. It will not surprise you, it will not displease you. I am as unhappy as you can ever have meant me to be."

Miss Havisham continued to look steadily at me. I could see in the action of Estella's fingers as they worked that she attended to what I said; but she did not look up.

"I have found out who my patron is. It is not a fortunate discovery, and is not likely ever to enrich me in reputation, station, fortune, anything. There are reasons why I must say no more of that. It is not my secret, but

another's."

As I was silent for a while, looking at Estella and considering how to go on, Miss Havisham repeated, "It is not your secret, but another's. Well?"

"When you first caused me to be brought here, Miss Havisham, when I belonged to the village over yonder, that I wish I had never left, I suppose I did really come here, as any other chance boy might have come,—as a kind of servant, to gratify a want or a whim, and to be paid for it?"

"Ay, Pip," replied Miss Havisham, steadily nodding her head; "you did."

"And that Mr. Jaggers—"

"Mr. Jaggers," said Miss Havisham, taking me up in a firm tone, "had nothing to do with it, and knew nothing of it. His being my lawyer, and his being the lawyer of your patron is a coincidence. He holds the same relation towards numbers of people, and it might easily arise. Be that as it may, it did arise, and was not brought about by any one."

Any one might have seen in her haggard face that there was no suppression or evasion so far.

"But when I fell into the mistake I have so long remained in, at least you led me on?" said I.

"Yes," she returned, again nodding steadily, "I let you go on."

"Was that kind?"

"Who am I," cried Miss Havisham, striking her stick upon the floor and flashing into wrath so suddenly that Estella glanced up at her in surprise, —"who am I, for God's sake, that I should be kind?"

It was a weak complaint to have made, and I had not meant to make it. I told her so, as she sat brooding after this outburst.

"Well, well, well!" she said. "What else?"

"I was liberally paid for my old attendance here," I said, to soothe her, "in being apprenticed, and I have asked these questions only for my own information. What follows has another (and I hope more disinterested) purpose. In humoring my mistake, Miss Havisham, you punished—practised on—perhaps you will supply whatever term expresses your intention, without offence—your self-seeking relations?"

"I did. Why, they would have it so! So would you. What has been my history, that I should be at the pains of entreating either them or you not to have it so! You made your own snares. I never made them."

Waiting until she was quiet again,—for this, too, flashed out of her in a

wild and sudden way,—I went on.

“I have been thrown among one family of your relations, Miss Havisham, and have been constantly among them since I went to London. I know them to have been as honestly under my delusion as I myself. And I should be false and base if I did not tell you, whether it is acceptable to you or no, and whether you are inclined to give credence to it or no, that you deeply wrong both Mr. Matthew Pocket and his son Herbert, if you suppose them to be otherwise than generous, upright, open, and incapable of anything designing or mean.”

“They are your friends,” said Miss Havisham.

“They made themselves my friends,” said I, “when they supposed me to have superseded them; and when Sarah Pocket, Miss Georgiana, and Mistress Camilla were not my friends, I think.”

This contrasting of them with the rest seemed, I was glad to see, to do them good with her. She looked at me keenly for a little while, and then said quietly,—

“What do you want for them?”

“Only,” said I, “that you would not confound them with the others. They may be of the same blood, but, believe me, they are not of the same nature.”

Still looking at me keenly, Miss Havisham repeated,—

“What do you want for them?”

“I am not so cunning, you see,” I said, in answer, conscious that I reddened a little, “as that I could hide from you, even if I desired, that I do want something. Miss Havisham, if you would spare the money to do my friend Herbert a lasting service in life, but which from the nature of the case must be done without his knowledge, I could show you how.”

“Why must it be done without his knowledge?” she asked, settling her hands upon her stick, that she might regard me the more attentively.

“Because,” said I, “I began the service myself, more than two years ago, without his knowledge, and I don’t want to be betrayed. Why I fail in my ability to finish it, I cannot explain. It is a part of the secret which is another person’s and not mine.”

She gradually withdrew her eyes from me, and turned them on the fire. After watching it for what appeared in the silence and by the light of the slowly wasting candles to be a long time, she was roused by the collapse of some of the red coals, and looked towards me again—at first, vacantly—

then, with a gradually concentrating attention. All this time Estella knitted on. When Miss Havisham had fixed her attention on me, she said, speaking as if there had been no lapse in our dialogue,—

"What else?"

"Estella," said I, turning to her now, and trying to command my trembling voice, "you know I love you. You know that I have loved you long and dearly."

She raised her eyes to my face, on being thus addressed, and her fingers plied their work, and she looked at me with an unmoved countenance. I saw that Miss Havisham glanced from me to her, and from her to me.

"I should have said this sooner, but for my long mistake. It induced me to hope that Miss Havisham meant us for one another. While I thought you could not help yourself, as it were, I refrained from saying it. But I must say it now."

Preserving her unmoved countenance, and with her fingers still going, Estella shook her head.

"I know," said I, in answer to that action,—"I know. I have no hope that I shall ever call you mine, Estella. I am ignorant what may become of me very soon, how poor I may be, or where I may go. Still, I love you. I have loved you ever since I first saw you in this house."

Looking at me perfectly unmoved and with her fingers busy, she shook her head again.

"It would have been cruel in Miss Havisham, horribly cruel, to practise on the susceptibility of a poor boy, and to torture me through all these years with a vain hope and an idle pursuit, if she had reflected on the gravity of what she did. But I think she did not. I think that, in the endurance of her own trial, she forgot mine, Estella."

I saw Miss Havisham put her hand to her heart and hold it there, as she sat looking by turns at Estella and at me.

"It seems," said Estella, very calmly, "that there are sentiments, fancies, —I don't know how to call them,—which I am not able to comprehend. When you say you love me, I know what you mean, as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there. I don't care for what you say at all. I have tried to warn you of this; now, have I not?"

I said in a miserable manner, "Yes."

“Yes. But you would not be warned, for you thought I did not mean it. Now, did you not think so?”

“I thought and hoped you could not mean it. You, so young, untried, and beautiful, Estella! Surely it is not in Nature.”

“It is in my nature,” she returned. And then she added, with a stress upon the words, “It is in the nature formed within me. I make a great difference between you and all other people when I say so much. I can do no more.”

“Is it not true,” said I, “that Bentley Drummle is in town here, and pursuing you?”

“It is quite true,” she replied, referring to him with the indifference of utter contempt.

“That you encourage him, and ride out with him, and that he dines with you this very day?”

She seemed a little surprised that I should know it, but again replied, “Quite true.”

“You cannot love him, Estella!”

Her fingers stopped for the first time, as she retorted rather angrily, “What have I told you? Do you still think, in spite of it, that I do not mean what I say?”

“You would never marry him, Estella?”

She looked towards Miss Havisham, and considered for a moment with her work in her hands. Then she said, “Why not tell you the truth? I am going to be married to him.”

I dropped my face into my hands, but was able to control myself better than I could have expected, considering what agony it gave me to hear her say those words. When I raised my face again, there was such a ghastly look upon Miss Havisham’s, that it impressed me, even in my passionate hurry and grief.

“Estella, dearest Estella, do not let Miss Havisham lead you into this fatal step. Put me aside for ever,—you have done so, I well know,—but bestow yourself on some worthier person than Drummle. Miss Havisham gives you to him, as the greatest slight and injury that could be done to the many far better men who admire you, and to the few who truly love you. Among those few there may be one who loves you even as dearly, though he has not loved you as long, as I. Take him, and I can bear it better, for your sake!”

My earnestness awoke a wonder in her that seemed as if it would have been touched with compassion, if she could have rendered me at all intelligible to her own mind.

“I am going,” she said again, in a gentler voice, “to be married to him. The preparations for my marriage are making, and I shall be married soon. Why do you injuriously introduce the name of my mother by adoption? It is my own act.”

“Your own act, Estella, to fling yourself away upon a brute?”

“On whom should I fling myself away?” she retorted, with a smile. “Should I fling myself away upon the man who would the soonest feel (if people do feel such things) that I took nothing to him? There! It is done. I shall do well enough, and so will my husband. As to leading me into what you call this fatal step, Miss Havisham would have had me wait, and not marry yet; but I am tired of the life I have led, which has very few charms for me, and I am willing enough to change it. Say no more. We shall never understand each other.”

“Such a mean brute, such a stupid brute!” I urged, in despair.

“Don’t be afraid of my being a blessing to him,” said Estella; “I shall not be that. Come! Here is my hand. Do we part on this, you visionary boy—or man?”

“O Estella!” I answered, as my bitter tears fell fast on her hand, do what I would to restrain them; “even if I remained in England and could hold my head up with the rest, how could I see you Drummle’s wife?”

“Nonsense,” she returned,—“nonsense. This will pass in no time.”

“Never, Estella!”

“You will get me out of your thoughts in a week.”

“Out of my thoughts! You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have ever read since I first came here, the rough common boy whose poor heart you wounded even then. You have been in every prospect I have ever seen since,—on the river, on the sails of the ships, on the marshes, in the clouds, in the light, in the darkness, in the wind, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets. You have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with. The stones of which the strongest London buildings are made are not more real, or more impossible to be displaced by your hands, than your presence and influence have been to me, there and everywhere,

and will be. Estella, to the last hour of my life, you cannot choose but remain part of my character, part of the little good in me, part of the evil. But, in this separation, I associate you only with the good; and I will faithfully hold you to that always, for you must have done me far more good than harm, let me feel now what sharp distress I may. O God bless you, God forgive you!”

In what ecstasy of unhappiness I got these broken words out of myself, I don’t know. The rhapsody welled up within me, like blood from an inward wound, and gushed out. I held her hand to my lips some lingering moments, and so I left her. But ever afterwards, I remembered,—and soon afterwards with stronger reason,—that while Estella looked at me merely with incredulous wonder, the spectral figure of Miss Havisham, her hand still covering her heart, seemed all resolved into a ghastly stare of pity and remorse.

All done, all gone! So much was done and gone, that when I went out at the gate, the light of the day seemed of a darker color than when I went in. For a while, I hid myself among some lanes and by-paths, and then struck off to walk all the way to London. For, I had by that time come to myself so far as to consider that I could not go back to the inn and see Drummle there; that I could not bear to sit upon the coach and be spoken to; that I could do nothing half so good for myself as tire myself out.

It was past midnight when I crossed London Bridge. Pursuing the narrow intricacies of the streets which at that time tended westward near the Middlesex shore of the river, my readiest access to the Temple was close by the river-side, through Whitefriars. I was not expected till to-morrow; but I had my keys, and, if Herbert were gone to bed, could get to bed myself without disturbing him.

As it seldom happened that I came in at that Whitefriars gate after the Temple was closed, and as I was very muddy and weary, I did not take it ill that the night-porter examined me with much attention as he held the gate a little way open for me to pass in. To help his memory I mentioned my name.

“I was not quite sure, sir, but I thought so. Here’s a note, sir. The messenger that brought it, said would you be so good as read it by my lantern?”

Much surprised by the request, I took the note. It was directed to Philip

Pip, Esquire, and on the top of the superscription were the words, “PLEASE READ THIS, HERE.” I opened it, the watchman holding up his light, and read inside, in Wemmick’s writing,—

“DON’T GO HOME.”

Chapter XLV

TURNING FROM THE TEMPLE gate as soon as I had read the warning, I made the best of my way to Fleet Street, and there got a late hackney chariot and drove to the Hummums in Covent Garden. In those times a bed was always to be got there at any hour of the night, and the chamberlain, letting me in at his ready wicket, lighted the candle next in order on his shelf, and showed me straight into the bedroom next in order on his list. It was a sort of vault on the ground floor at the back, with a despotic monster of a four-post bedstead in it, straddling over the whole place, putting one of his arbitrary legs into the fireplace and another into the doorway, and squeezing the wretched little washing-stand in quite a Divinely Righteous manner.

As I had asked for a night-light, the chamberlain had brought me in, before he left me, the good old constitutional rushlight of those virtuous days,—an object like the ghost of a walking-cane, which instantly broke its back if it were touched, which nothing could ever be lighted at, and which was placed in solitary confinement at the bottom of a high tin tower, perforated with round holes that made a staringly wide-awake pattern on the walls. When I had got into bed, and lay there footsore, weary, and wretched, I found that I could no more close my own eyes than I could close the eyes of this foolish Argus. And thus, in the gloom and death of the night, we stared at one another.

What a doleful night! How anxious, how dismal, how long! There was an inhospitable smell in the room, of cold soot and hot dust; and, as I looked up into the corners of the tester over my head, I thought what a number of blue-bottle flies from the butchers', and earwigs from the market, and grubs from the country, must be holding on up there, lying by for next summer. This led me to speculate whether any of them ever tumbled down, and then I fancied that I felt light falls on my face,—a

disagreeable turn of thought, suggesting other and more objectionable approaches up my back. When I had lain awake a little while, those extraordinary voices with which silence teems began to make themselves audible. The closet whispered, the fireplace sighed, the little washing-stand ticked, and one guitar-string played occasionally in the chest of drawers. At about the same time, the eyes on the wall acquired a new expression, and in every one of those staring rounds I saw written, DON'T GO HOME.

Whatever night-fancies and night-noises crowded on me, they never warded off this DON'T GO HOME. It plaited itself into whatever I thought of, as a bodily pain would have done. Not long before, I had read in the newspapers, how a gentleman unknown had come to the Hummums in the night, and had gone to bed, and had destroyed himself, and had been found in the morning weltering in blood. It came into my head that he must have occupied this very vault of mine, and I got out of bed to assure myself that there were no red marks about; then opened the door to look out into the passages, and cheer myself with the companionship of a distant light, near which I knew the chamberlain to be dozing. But all this time, why I was not to go home, and what had happened at home, and when I should go home, and whether Provis was safe at home, were questions occupying my mind so busily, that one might have supposed there could be no more room in it for any other theme. Even when I thought of Estella, and how we had parted that day forever, and when I recalled all the circumstances of our parting, and all her looks and tones, and the action of her fingers while she knitted,—even then I was pursuing, here and there and everywhere, the caution, Don't go home. When at last I dozed, in sheer exhaustion of mind and body, it became a vast shadowy verb which I had to conjugate. Imperative mood, present tense: Do not thou go home, let him not go home, let us not go home, do not ye or you go home, let not them go home. Then potentially: I may not and I cannot go home; and I might not, could not, would not, and should not go home; until I felt that I was going distracted, and rolled over on the pillow, and looked at the staring rounds upon the wall again.

I had left directions that I was to be called at seven; for it was plain that I must see Wemmick before seeing any one else, and equally plain that this was a case in which his Walworth sentiments only could be taken. It was a relief to get out of the room where the night had been so miserable, and I

needed no second knocking at the door to startle me from my uneasy bed.

The Castle battlements arose upon my view at eight o'clock. The little servant happening to be entering the fortress with two hot rolls, I passed through the postern and crossed the drawbridge in her company, and so came without announcement into the presence of Wemmick as he was making tea for himself and the Aged. An open door afforded a perspective view of the Aged in bed.

"Halloa, Mr. Pip!" said Wemmick. "You did come home, then?"

"Yes," I returned; "but I didn't go home."

"That's all right," said he, rubbing his hands. "I left a note for you at each of the Temple gates, on the chance. Which gate did you come to?"

I told him.

"I'll go round to the others in the course of the day and destroy the notes," said Wemmick; "it's a good rule never to leave documentary evidence if you can help it, because you don't know when it may be put in. I'm going to take a liberty with you. Would you mind toasting this sausage for the Aged P.?"

I said I should be delighted to do it.

"Then you can go about your work, Mary Anne," said Wemmick to the little servant; "which leaves us to ourselves, don't you see, Mr. Pip?" he added, winking, as she disappeared.

I thanked him for his friendship and caution, and our discourse proceeded in a low tone, while I toasted the Aged's sausage and he buttered the crumb of the Aged's roll.

"Now, Mr. Pip, you know," said Wemmick, "you and I understand one another. We are in our private and personal capacities, and we have been engaged in a confidential transaction before to-day. Official sentiments are one thing. We are extra official."

I cordially assented. I was so very nervous, that I had already lighted the Aged's sausage like a torch, and been obliged to blow it out.

"I accidentally heard, yesterday morning," said Wemmick, "being in a certain place where I once took you,—even between you and me, it's as well not to mention names when avoidable—"

"Much better not," said I. "I understand you."

"I heard there by chance, yesterday morning," said Wemmick, "that a certain person not altogether of uncolonial pursuits, and not unpossessed of

portable property,—I don’t know who it may really be,—we won’t name this person—”

“Not necessary,” said I.

“—Had made some little stir in a certain part of the world where a good many people go, not always in gratification of their own inclinations, and not quite irrespective of the government expense—”

In watching his face, I made quite a firework of the Aged’s sausage, and greatly discomposed both my own attention and Wemmick’s; for which I apologized.

“—By disappearing from such place, and being no more heard of thereabouts. From which,” said Wemmick, “conjectures had been raised and theories formed. I also heard that you at your chambers in Garden Court, Temple, had been watched, and might be watched again.”

“By whom?” said I.

“I wouldn’t go into that,” said Wemmick, evasively, “it might clash with official responsibilities. I heard it, as I have in my time heard other curious things in the same place. I don’t tell it you on information received. I heard it.”

He took the toasting-fork and sausage from me as he spoke, and set forth the Aged’s breakfast neatly on a little tray. Previous to placing it before him, he went into the Aged’s room with a clean white cloth, and tied the same under the old gentleman’s chin, and propped him up, and put his nightcap on one side, and gave him quite a rakish air. Then he placed his breakfast before him with great care, and said, “All right, ain’t you, Aged P.?” To which the cheerful Aged replied, “All right, John, my boy, all right!” As there seemed to be a tacit understanding that the Aged was not in a presentable state, and was therefore to be considered invisible, I made a pretence of being in complete ignorance of these proceedings.

“This watching of me at my chambers (which I have once had reason to suspect),” I said to Wemmick when he came back, “is inseparable from the person to whom you have adverted; is it?”

Wemmick looked very serious. “I couldn’t undertake to say that, of my own knowledge. I mean, I couldn’t undertake to say it was at first. But it either is, or it will be, or it’s in great danger of being.”

As I saw that he was restrained by fealty to Little Britain from saying as much as he could, and as I knew with thankfulness to him how far out of his

way he went to say what he did, I could not press him. But I told him, after a little meditation over the fire, that I would like to ask him a question, subject to his answering or not answering, as he deemed right, and sure that his course would be right. He paused in his breakfast, and crossing his arms, and pinching his shirt-sleeves (his notion of in-door comfort was to sit without any coat), he nodded to me once, to put my question.

"You have heard of a man of bad character, whose true name is Compeyson?"

He answered with one other nod.

"Is he living?"

One other nod.

"Is he in London?"

He gave me one other nod, compressed the post-office exceedingly, gave me one last nod, and went on with his breakfast.

"Now," said Wemmick, "questioning being over," which he emphasized and repeated for my guidance, "I come to what I did, after hearing what I heard. I went to Garden Court to find you; not finding you, I went to Clarriker's to find Mr. Herbert."

"And him you found?" said I, with great anxiety.

"And him I found. Without mentioning any names or going into any details, I gave him to understand that if he was aware of anybody—Tom, Jack, or Richard—being about the chambers, or about the immediate neighborhood, he had better get Tom, Jack, or Richard out of the way while you were out of the way."

"He would be greatly puzzled what to do?"

"He was puzzled what to do; not the less, because I gave him my opinion that it was not safe to try to get Tom, Jack, or Richard too far out of the way at present. Mr. Pip, I'll tell you something. Under existing circumstances, there is no place like a great city when you are once in it. Don't break cover too soon. Lie close. Wait till things slacken, before you try the open, even for foreign air."

I thanked him for his valuable advice, and asked him what Herbert had done?

"Mr. Herbert," said Wemmick, "after being all of a heap for half an hour, struck out a plan. He mentioned to me as a secret, that he is courting a young lady who has, as no doubt you are aware, a bedridden Pa. Which Pa,

having been in the Purser line of life, lies a-bed in a bow-window where he can see the ships sail up and down the river. You are acquainted with the young lady, most probably?"

"Not personally," said I.

The truth was, that she had objected to me as an expensive companion who did Herbert no good, and that, when Herbert had first proposed to present me to her, she had received the proposal with such very moderate warmth, that Herbert had felt himself obliged to confide the state of the case to me, with a view to the lapse of a little time before I made her acquaintance. When I had begun to advance Herbert's prospects by stealth, I had been able to bear this with cheerful philosophy: he and his affianced, for their part, had naturally not been very anxious to introduce a third person into their interviews; and thus, although I was assured that I had risen in Clara's esteem, and although the young lady and I had long regularly interchanged messages and remembrances by Herbert, I had never seen her. However, I did not trouble Wemmick with these particulars.

"The house with the bow-window," said Wemmick, "being by the river-side, down the Pool there between Limehouse and Greenwich, and being kept, it seems, by a very respectable widow who has a furnished upper floor to let, Mr. Herbert put it to me, what did I think of that as a temporary tenement for Tom, Jack, or Richard? Now, I thought very well of it, for three reasons I'll give you. That is to say: Firstly. It's altogether out of all your beats, and is well away from the usual heap of streets great and small. Secondly. Without going near it yourself, you could always hear of the safety of Tom, Jack, or Richard, through Mr. Herbert. Thirdly. After a while and when it might be prudent, if you should want to slip Tom, Jack, or Richard on board a foreign packet-boat, there he is—ready."

Much comforted by these considerations, I thanked Wemmick again and again, and begged him to proceed.

"Well, sir! Mr. Herbert threw himself into the business with a will, and by nine o'clock last night he housed Tom, Jack, or Richard,—whichever it may be,—you and I don't want to know,—quite successfully. At the old lodgings it was understood that he was summoned to Dover, and, in fact, he was taken down the Dover road and cornered out of it. Now, another great advantage of all this is, that it was done without you, and when, if any one was concerning himself about your movements, you must be known to be

ever so many miles off and quite otherwise engaged. This diverts suspicion and confuses it; and for the same reason I recommended that, even if you came back last night, you should not go home. It brings in more confusion, and you want confusion."

Wemmick, having finished his breakfast, here looked at his watch, and began to get his coat on.

"And now, Mr. Pip," said he, with his hands still in the sleeves, "I have probably done the most I can do; but if I can ever do more,—from a Walworth point of view, and in a strictly private and personal capacity,—I shall be glad to do it. Here's the address. There can be no harm in your going here to-night, and seeing for yourself that all is well with Tom, Jack, or Richard, before you go home,—which is another reason for your not going home last night. But, after you have gone home, don't go back here. You are very welcome, I am sure, Mr. Pip"; his hands were now out of his sleeves, and I was shaking them; "and let me finally impress one important point upon you." He laid his hands upon my shoulders, and added in a solemn whisper: "Avail yourself of this evening to lay hold of his portable property. You don't know what may happen to him. Don't let anything happen to the portable property."

Quite despairing of making my mind clear to Wemmick on this point, I forbore to try.

"Time's up," said Wemmick, "and I must be off. If you had nothing more pressing to do than to keep here till dark, that's what I should advise. You look very much worried, and it would do you good to have a perfectly quiet day with the Aged,—he'll be up presently,—and a little bit of—you remember the pig?"

"Of course," said I.

"Well; and a little bit of him. That sausage you toasted was his, and he was in all respects a first-rater. Do try him, if it is only for old acquaintance sake. Good by, Aged Parent!" in a cheery shout.

"All right, John; all right, my boy!" piped the old man from within.

I soon fell asleep before Wemmick's fire, and the Aged and I enjoyed one another's society by falling asleep before it more or less all day. We had loin of pork for dinner, and greens grown on the estate; and I nodded at the Aged with a good intention whenever I failed to do it drowsily. When it was quite dark, I left the Aged preparing the fire for toast; and I inferred from

the number of teacups, as well as from his glances at the two little doors in the wall, that Miss Skiffins was expected.

Chapter XLVI

EIGHT O’CLOCK HAD STRUCK before I got into the air, that was scented, not disagreeably, by the chips and shavings of the long-shore boat-builders, and mast, oar, and block makers. All that water-side region of the upper and lower Pool below Bridge was unknown ground to me; and when I struck down by the river, I found that the spot I wanted was not where I had supposed it to be, and was anything but easy to find. It was called Mill Pond Bank, Chinks’s Basin; and I had no other guide to Chinks’s Basin than the Old Green Copper Ropewalk.

It matters not what stranded ships repairing in dry docks I lost myself among, what old hulls of ships in course of being knocked to pieces, what ooze and slime and other dregs of tide, what yards of ship-builders and ship-breakers, what rusty anchors blindly biting into the ground, though for years off duty, what mountainous country of accumulated casks and timber, how many ropewalks that were not the Old Green Copper. After several times falling short of my destination and as often overshooting it, I came unexpectedly round a corner, upon Mill Pond Bank. It was a fresh kind of place, all circumstances considered, where the wind from the river had room to turn itself round; and there were two or three trees in it, and there was the stump of a ruined windmill, and there was the Old Green Copper Ropewalk,—whose long and narrow vista I could trace in the moonlight, along a series of wooden frames set in the ground, that looked like superannuated haymaking-rakes which had grown old and lost most of their teeth.

Selecting from the few queer houses upon Mill Pond Bank a house with a wooden front and three stories of bow-window (not bay-window, which is another thing), I looked at the plate upon the door, and read there, Mrs. Whimple. That being the name I wanted, I knocked, and an elderly woman

of a pleasant and thriving appearance responded. She was immediately deposed, however, by Herbert, who silently led me into the parlor and shut the door. It was an odd sensation to see his very familiar face established quite at home in that very unfamiliar room and region; and I found myself looking at him, much as I looked at the corner-cupboard with the glass and china, the shells upon the chimney-piece, and the colored engravings on the wall, representing the death of Captain Cook, a ship-launch, and his Majesty King George the Third in a state coachman's wig, leather-breeches, and top-boots, on the terrace at Windsor.

"All is well, Handel," said Herbert, "and he is quite satisfied, though eager to see you. My dear girl is with her father; and if you'll wait till she comes down, I'll make you known to her, and then we'll go up stairs. That's her father."

I had become aware of an alarming growling overhead, and had probably expressed the fact in my countenance.

"I am afraid he is a sad old rascal," said Herbert, smiling, "but I have never seen him. Don't you smell rum? He is always at it."

"At rum?" said I.

"Yes," returned Herbert, "and you may suppose how mild it makes his gout. He persists, too, in keeping all the provisions up stairs in his room, and serving them out. He keeps them on shelves over his head, and will weigh them all. His room must be like a chandler's shop."

While he thus spoke, the growling noise became a prolonged roar, and then died away.

"What else can be the consequence," said Herbert, in explanation, "if he will cut the cheese? A man with the gout in his right hand—and everywhere else—can't expect to get through a Double Gloucester without hurting himself."

He seemed to have hurt himself very much, for he gave another furious roar.

"To have Provis for an upper lodger is quite a godsend to Mrs. Whimple," said Herbert, "for of course people in general won't stand that noise. A curious place, Handel; isn't it?"

It was a curious place, indeed; but remarkably well kept and clean.

"Mrs. Whimple," said Herbert, when I told him so, "is the best of housewives, and I really do not know what my Clara would do without her

motherly help. For, Clara has no mother of her own, Handel, and no relation in the world but old Gruffandgrim."

"Surely that's not his name, Herbert?"

"No, no," said Herbert, "that's my name for him. His name is Mr. Barley. But what a blessing it is for the son of my father and mother to love a girl who has no relations, and who can never bother herself or anybody else about her family!"

Herbert had told me on former occasions, and now reminded me, that he first knew Miss Clara Barley when she was completing her education at an establishment at Hammersmith, and that on her being recalled home to nurse her father, he and she had confided their affection to the motherly Mrs. Whimple, by whom it had been fostered and regulated with equal kindness and discretion, ever since. It was understood that nothing of a tender nature could possibly be confided to old Barley, by reason of his being totally unequal to the consideration of any subject more psychological than Gout, Rum, and Purser's stores.

As we were thus conversing in a low tone while Old Barley's sustained growl vibrated in the beam that crossed the ceiling, the room door opened, and a very pretty, slight, dark-eyed girl of twenty or so came in with a basket in her hand: whom Herbert tenderly relieved of the basket, and presented, blushing, as "Clara." She really was a most charming girl, and might have passed for a captive fairy, whom that truculent Ogre, Old Barley, had pressed into his service.

"Look here," said Herbert, showing me the basket, with a compassionate and tender smile, after we had talked a little; "here's poor Clara's supper, served out every night. Here's her allowance of bread, and here's her slice of cheese, and here's her rum,—which I drink. This is Mr. Barley's breakfast for to-morrow, served out to be cooked. Two mutton-chops, three potatoes, some split peas, a little flour, two ounces of butter, a pinch of salt, and all this black pepper. It's stewed up together, and taken hot, and it's a nice thing for the gout, I should think!"

There was something so natural and winning in Clara's resigned way of looking at these stores in detail, as Herbert pointed them out; and something so confiding, loving, and innocent in her modest manner of yielding herself to Herbert's embracing arm; and something so gentle in her, so much needing protection on Mill Pond Bank, by Chinks's Basin, and the Old

Green Copper Ropewalk, with Old Barley growling in the beam,—that I would not have undone the engagement between her and Herbert for all the money in the pocket-book I had never opened.

I was looking at her with pleasure and admiration, when suddenly the growl swelled into a roar again, and a frightful bumping noise was heard above, as if a giant with a wooden leg were trying to bore it through the ceiling to come at us. Upon this Clara said to Herbert, “Papa wants me, darling!” and ran away.

“There is an unconscionable old shark for you!” said Herbert. “What do you suppose he wants now, Handel?”

“I don’t know,” said I. “Something to drink?”

“That’s it!” cried Herbert, as if I had made a guess of extraordinary merit. “He keeps his grog ready mixed in a little tub on the table. Wait a moment, and you’ll hear Clara lift him up to take some. There he goes!” Another roar, with a prolonged shake at the end. “Now,” said Herbert, as it was succeeded by silence, “he’s drinking. Now,” said Herbert, as the growl resounded in the beam once more, “he’s down again on his back!”

Clara returned soon afterwards, and Herbert accompanied me up stairs to see our charge. As we passed Mr. Barley’s door, he was heard hoarsely muttering within, in a strain that rose and fell like wind, the following Refrain, in which I substitute good wishes for something quite the reverse:—

“Ahoy! Bless your eyes, here’s old Bill Barley. Here’s old Bill Barley, bless your eyes. Here’s old Bill Barley on the flat of his back, by the Lord. Lying on the flat of his back like a drifting old dead flounder, here’s your old Bill Barley, bless your eyes. Ahoy! Bless you.”

In this strain of consolation, Herbert informed me the invisible Barley would commune with himself by the day and night together; often, while it was light, having, at the same time, one eye at a telescope which was fitted on his bed for the convenience of sweeping the river.

In his two cabin rooms at the top of the house, which were fresh and airy, and in which Mr. Barley was less audible than below, I found Provis comfortably settled. He expressed no alarm, and seemed to feel none that was worth mentioning; but it struck me that he was softened,—indefinably, for I could not have said how, and could never afterwards recall how when I tried, but certainly.

The opportunity that the day's rest had given me for reflection had resulted in my fully determining to say nothing to him respecting Compeyson. For anything I knew, his animosity towards the man might otherwise lead to his seeking him out and rushing on his own destruction. Therefore, when Herbert and I sat down with him by his fire, I asked him first of all whether he relied on Wemmick's judgment and sources of information?

"Ay, ay, dear boy!" he answered, with a grave nod, "Jaggers knows."

"Then, I have talked with Wemmick," said I, "and have come to tell you what caution he gave me and what advice."

This I did accurately, with the reservation just mentioned; and I told him how Wemmick had heard, in Newgate prison (whether from officers or prisoners I could not say), that he was under some suspicion, and that my chambers had been watched; how Wemmick had recommended his keeping close for a time, and my keeping away from him; and what Wemmick had said about getting him abroad. I added, that of course, when the time came, I should go with him, or should follow close upon him, as might be safest in Wemmick's judgment. What was to follow that I did not touch upon; neither, indeed, was I at all clear or comfortable about it in my own mind, now that I saw him in that softer condition, and in declared peril for my sake. As to altering my way of living by enlarging my expenses, I put it to him whether in our present unsettled and difficult circumstances, it would not be simply ridiculous, if it were no worse?

He could not deny this, and indeed was very reasonable throughout. His coming back was a venture, he said, and he had always known it to be a venture. He would do nothing to make it a desperate venture, and he had very little fear of his safety with such good help.

Herbert, who had been looking at the fire and pondering, here said that something had come into his thoughts arising out of Wemmick's suggestion, which it might be worth while to pursue. "We are both good watermen, Handel, and could take him down the river ourselves when the right time comes. No boat would then be hired for the purpose, and no boatmen; that would save at least a chance of suspicion, and any chance is worth saving. Never mind the season; don't you think it might be a good thing if you began at once to keep a boat at the Temple stairs, and were in the habit of rowing up and down the river? You fall into that habit, and then

who notices or minds? Do it twenty or fifty times, and there is nothing special in your doing it the twenty-first or fifty-first."

I liked this scheme, and Provis was quite elated by it. We agreed that it should be carried into execution, and that Provis should never recognize us if we came below Bridge, and rowed past Mill Pond Bank. But we further agreed that he should pull down the blind in that part of his window which gave upon the east, whenever he saw us and all was right.

Our conference being now ended, and everything arranged, I rose to go; remarking to Herbert that he and I had better not go home together, and that I would take half an hour's start of him. "I don't like to leave you here," I said to Provis, "though I cannot doubt your being safer here than near me. Good by!"

"Dear boy," he answered, clasping my hands, "I don't know when we may meet again, and I don't like good by. Say good night!"

"Good night! Herbert will go regularly between us, and when the time comes you may be certain I shall be ready. Good night, good night!"

We thought it best that he should stay in his own rooms; and we left him on the landing outside his door, holding a light over the stair-rail to light us down-stairs. Looking back at him, I thought of the first night of his return, when our positions were reversed, and when I little supposed my heart could ever be as heavy and anxious at parting from him as it was now.

Old Barley was growling and swearing when we repassed his door, with no appearance of having ceased or of meaning to cease. When we got to the foot of the stairs, I asked Herbert whether he had preserved the name of Provis. He replied, certainly not, and that the lodger was Mr. Campbell. He also explained that the utmost known of Mr. Campbell there was, that he (Herbert) had Mr. Campbell consigned to him, and felt a strong personal interest in his being well cared for, and living a secluded life. So, when we went into the parlor where Mrs. Whimple and Clara were seated at work, I said nothing of my own interest in Mr. Campbell, but kept it to myself.

When I had taken leave of the pretty, gentle, dark-eyed girl, and of the motherly woman who had not outlived her honest sympathy with a little affair of true love, I felt as if the Old Green Copper Ropewalk had grown quite a different place. Old Barley might be as old as the hills, and might swear like a whole field of troopers, but there were redeeming youth and trust and hope enough in Chinks's Basin to fill it to overflowing. And then I

thought of Estella, and of our parting, and went home very sadly.

All things were as quiet in the Temple as ever I had seen them. The windows of the rooms on that side, lately occupied by Provis, were dark and still, and there was no lounger in Garden Court. I walked past the fountain twice or thrice before I descended the steps that were between me and my rooms, but I was quite alone. Herbert, coming to my bedside when he came in,—for I went straight to bed, dispirited and fatigued,—made the same report. Opening one of the windows after that, he looked out into the moonlight, and told me that the pavement was a solemnly empty as the pavement of any cathedral at that same hour.

Next day I set myself to get the boat. It was soon done, and the boat was brought round to the Temple stairs, and lay where I could reach her within a minute or two. Then, I began to go out as for training and practice: sometimes alone, sometimes with Herbert. I was often out in cold, rain, and sleet, but nobody took much note of me after I had been out a few times. At first, I kept above Blackfriars Bridge; but as the hours of the tide changed, I took towards London Bridge. It was Old London Bridge in those days, and at certain states of the tide there was a race and fall of water there which gave it a bad reputation. But I knew well enough how to ‘shoot’ the bridge after seeing it done, and so began to row about among the shipping in the Pool, and down to Erith. The first time I passed Mill Pond Bank, Herbert and I were pulling a pair of oars; and, both in going and returning, we saw the blind towards the east come down. Herbert was rarely there less frequently than three times in a week, and he never brought me a single word of intelligence that was at all alarming. Still, I knew that there was cause for alarm, and I could not get rid of the notion of being watched. Once received, it is a haunting idea; how many undesigning persons I suspected of watching me, it would be hard to calculate.

In short, I was always full of fears for the rash man who was in hiding. Herbert had sometimes said to me that he found it pleasant to stand at one of our windows after dark, when the tide was running down, and to think that it was flowing, with everything it bore, towards Clara. But I thought with dread that it was flowing towards Magwitch, and that any black mark on its surface might be his pursuers, going swiftly, silently, and surely, to take him.

Chapter XLVII

SOME WEEKS PASSED WITHOUT bringing any change. We waited for Wemmick, and he made no sign. If I had never known him out of Little Britain, and had never enjoyed the privilege of being on a familiar footing at the Castle, I might have doubted him; not so for a moment, knowing him as I did.

My worldly affairs began to wear a gloomy appearance, and I was pressed for money by more than one creditor. Even I myself began to know the want of money (I mean of ready money in my own pocket), and to relieve it by converting some easily spared articles of jewelery into cash. But I had quite determined that it would be a heartless fraud to take more money from my patron in the existing state of my uncertain thoughts and plans. Therefore, I had sent him the unopened pocket-book by Herbert, to hold in his own keeping, and I felt a kind of satisfaction—whether it was a false kind or a true, I hardly know—in not having profited by his generosity since his revelation of himself.

As the time wore on, an impression settled heavily upon me that Estella was married. Fearful of having it confirmed, though it was all but a conviction, I avoided the newspapers, and begged Herbert (to whom I had confided the circumstances of our last interview) never to speak of her to me. Why I hoarded up this last wretched little rag of the robe of hope that was rent and given to the winds, how do I know? Why did you who read this, commit that not dissimilar inconsistency of your own last year, last month, last week?

It was an unhappy life that I lived; and its one dominant anxiety, towering over all its other anxieties, like a high mountain above a range of mountains, never disappeared from my view. Still, no new cause for fear arose. Let me start from my bed as I would, with the terror fresh upon me

that he was discovered; let me sit listening, as I would with dread, for Herbert's returning step at night, lest it should be fleeter than ordinary, and winged with evil news,—for all that, and much more to like purpose, the round of things went on. Condemned to inaction and a state of constant restlessness and suspense, I rowed about in my boat, and waited, waited, waited, as I best could.

There were states of the tide when, having been down the river, I could not get back through the eddy-chafed arches and starlings of old London Bridge; then, I left my boat at a wharf near the Custom House, to be brought up afterwards to the Temple stairs. I was not averse to doing this, as it served to make me and my boat a commoner incident among the water-side people there. From this slight occasion sprang two meetings that I have now to tell of.

One afternoon, late in the month of February, I came ashore at the wharf at dusk. I had pulled down as far as Greenwich with the ebb tide, and had turned with the tide. It had been a fine bright day, but had become foggy as the sun dropped, and I had had to feel my way back among the shipping, pretty carefully. Both in going and returning, I had seen the signal in his window, All well.

As it was a raw evening, and I was cold, I thought I would comfort myself with dinner at once; and as I had hours of dejection and solitude before me if I went home to the Temple, I thought I would afterwards go to the play. The theatre where Mr. Wopsle had achieved his questionable triumph was in that water-side neighborhood (it is nowhere now), and to that theatre I resolved to go. I was aware that Mr. Wopsle had not succeeded in reviving the Drama, but, on the contrary, had rather partaken of its decline. He had been ominously heard of, through the play-bills, as a faithful Black, in connection with a little girl of noble birth, and a monkey. And Herbert had seen him as a predatory Tartar of comic propensities, with a face like a red brick, and an outrageous hat all over bells.

I dined at what Herbert and I used to call a geographical chop-house, where there were maps of the world in porter-pot rims on every half-yard of the tablecloths, and charts of gravy on every one of the knives,—to this day there is scarcely a single chop-house within the Lord Mayor's dominions which is not geographical,—and wore out the time in dozing over crumbs, staring at gas, and baking in a hot blast of dinners. By and by, I roused

myself, and went to the play.

There, I found a virtuous boatswain in His Majesty's service,—a most excellent man, though I could have wished his trousers not quite so tight in some places, and not quite so loose in others,—who knocked all the little men's hats over their eyes, though he was very generous and brave, and who wouldn't hear of anybody's paying taxes, though he was very patriotic. He had a bag of money in his pocket, like a pudding in the cloth, and on that property married a young person in bed-furniture, with great rejoicings; the whole population of Portsmouth (nine in number at the last census) turning out on the beach to rub their own hands and shake everybody else's, and sing "Fill, fill!" A certain dark-complexioned Swab, however, who wouldn't fill, or do anything else that was proposed to him, and whose heart was openly stated (by the boatswain) to be as black as his figure-head, proposed to two other Swabs to get all mankind into difficulties; which was so effectually done (the Swab family having considerable political influence) that it took half the evening to set things right, and then it was only brought about through an honest little grocer with a white hat, black gaiters, and red nose, getting into a clock, with a gridiron, and listening, and coming out, and knocking everybody down from behind with the gridiron whom he couldn't confute with what he had overheard. This led to Mr. Wopsle's (who had never been heard of before) coming in with a star and garter on, as a plenipotentiary of great power direct from the Admiralty, to say that the Swabs were all to go to prison on the spot, and that he had brought the boatswain down the Union Jack, as a slight acknowledgment of his public services. The boatswain, unmanned for the first time, respectfully dried his eyes on the Jack, and then cheering up, and addressing Mr. Wopsle as Your Honor, solicited permission to take him by the fin. Mr. Wopsle, conceding his fin with a gracious dignity, was immediately shoved into a dusty corner, while everybody danced a hornpipe; and from that corner, surveying the public with a discontented eye, became aware of me.

The second piece was the last new grand comic Christmas pantomime, in the first scene of which, it pained me to suspect that I detected Mr. Wopsle with red worsted legs under a highly magnified phosphoric countenance and a shock of red curtain-fringe for his hair, engaged in the manufacture of thunderbolts in a mine, and displaying great cowardice when his gigantic master came home (very hoarse) to dinner. But he presently presented

himself under worthier circumstances; for, the Genius of Youthful Love being in want of assistance,—on account of the parental brutality of an ignorant farmer who opposed the choice of his daughter's heart, by purposely falling upon the object, in a flour-sack, out of the first-floor window,—summoned a sententious Enchanter; and he, coming up from the antipodes rather unsteadily, after an apparently violent journey, proved to be Mr. Wopsle in a high-crowned hat, with a necromantic work in one volume under his arm. The business of this enchanter on earth being principally to be talked at, sung at, butted at, danced at, and flashed at with fires of various colors, he had a good deal of time on his hands. And I observed, with great surprise, that he devoted it to staring in my direction as if he were lost in amazement.

There was something so remarkable in the increasing glare of Mr. Wopsle's eye, and he seemed to be turning so many things over in his mind and to grow so confused, that I could not make it out. I sat thinking of it long after he had ascended to the clouds in a large watch-case, and still I could not make it out. I was still thinking of it when I came out of the theatre an hour afterwards, and found him waiting for me near the door.

"How do you do?" said I, shaking hands with him as we turned down the street together. "I saw that you saw me."

"Saw you, Mr. Pip!" he returned. "Yes, of course I saw you. But who else was there?"

"Who else?"

"It is the strangest thing," said Mr. Wopsle, drifting into his lost look again; "and yet I could swear to him."

Becoming alarmed, I entreated Mr. Wopsle to explain his meaning.

"Whether I should have noticed him at first but for your being there," said Mr. Wopsle, going on in the same lost way, "I can't be positive; yet I think I should."

Involuntarily I looked round me, as I was accustomed to look round me when I went home; for these mysterious words gave me a chill.

"Oh! He can't be in sight," said Mr. Wopsle. "He went out before I went off. I saw him go."

Having the reason that I had for being suspicious, I even suspected this poor actor. I mistrusted a design to entrap me into some admission. Therefore I glanced at him as we walked on together, but said nothing.

“I had a ridiculous fancy that he must be with you, Mr. Pip, till I saw that you were quite unconscious of him, sitting behind you there like a ghost.”

My former chill crept over me again, but I was resolved not to speak yet, for it was quite consistent with his words that he might be set on to induce me to connect these references with Provis. Of course, I was perfectly sure and safe that Provis had not been there.

“I dare say you wonder at me, Mr. Pip; indeed, I see you do. But it is so very strange! You’ll hardly believe what I am going to tell you. I could hardly believe it myself, if you told me.”

“Indeed?” said I.

“No, indeed. Mr. Pip, you remember in old times a certain Christmas Day, when you were quite a child, and I dined at Gargery’s, and some soldiers came to the door to get a pair of handcuffs mended?”

“I remember it very well.”

“And you remember that there was a chase after two convicts, and that we joined in it, and that Gargery took you on his back, and that I took the lead, and you kept up with me as well as you could?”

“I remember it all very well.” Better than he thought,—except the last clause.

“And you remember that we came up with the two in a ditch, and that there was a scuffle between them, and that one of them had been severely handled and much mauled about the face by the other?”

“I see it all before me.”

“And that the soldiers lighted torches, and put the two in the centre, and that we went on to see the last of them, over the black marshes, with the torchlight shining on their faces,—I am particular about that,—with the torchlight shining on their faces, when there was an outer ring of dark night all about us?”

“Yes,” said I. “I remember all that.”

“Then, Mr. Pip, one of those two prisoners sat behind you tonight. I saw him over your shoulder.”

“Steady!” I thought. I asked him then, “Which of the two do you suppose you saw?”

“The one who had been mauled,” he answered readily, “and I’ll swear I saw him! The more I think of him, the more certain I am of him.”

“This is very curious!” said I, with the best assumption I could put on of

its being nothing more to me. “Very curious indeed!”

I cannot exaggerate the enhanced disquiet into which this conversation threw me, or the special and peculiar terror I felt at Compeyson’s having been behind me “like a ghost.” For if he had ever been out of my thoughts for a few moments together since the hiding had begun, it was in those very moments when he was closest to me; and to think that I should be so unconscious and off my guard after all my care was as if I had shut an avenue of a hundred doors to keep him out, and then had found him at my elbow. I could not doubt, either, that he was there, because I was there, and that, however slight an appearance of danger there might be about us, danger was always near and active.

I put such questions to Mr. Wopsle as, When did the man come in? He could not tell me that; he saw me, and over my shoulder he saw the man. It was not until he had seen him for some time that he began to identify him; but he had from the first vaguely associated him with me, and known him as somehow belonging to me in the old village time. How was he dressed? Prosperously, but not noticeably otherwise; he thought, in black. Was his face at all disfigured? No, he believed not. I believed not too, for, although in my brooding state I had taken no especial notice of the people behind me, I thought it likely that a face at all disfigured would have attracted my attention.

When Mr. Wopsle had imparted to me all that he could recall or I extract, and when I had treated him to a little appropriate refreshment, after the fatigues of the evening, we parted. It was between twelve and one o’clock when I reached the Temple, and the gates were shut. No one was near me when I went in and went home.

Herbert had come in, and we held a very serious council by the fire. But there was nothing to be done, saving to communicate to Wemmick what I had that night found out, and to remind him that we waited for his hint. As I thought that I might compromise him if I went too often to the Castle, I made this communication by letter. I wrote it before I went to bed, and went out and posted it; and again no one was near me. Herbert and I agreed that we could do nothing else but be very cautious. And we were very cautious indeed,—more cautious than before, if that were possible,—and I for my part never went near Chinks’s Basin, except when I rowed by, and then I only looked at Mill Pond Bank as I looked at anything else.

Chapter XLVIII

THE SECOND OF THE two meetings referred to in the last chapter occurred about a week after the first. I had again left my boat at the wharf below Bridge; the time was an hour earlier in the afternoon; and, undecided where to dine, I had strolled up into Cheapside, and was strolling along it, surely the most unsettled person in all the busy concourse, when a large hand was laid upon my shoulder by some one overtaking me. It was Mr. Jaggers's hand, and he passed it through my arm.

"As we are going in the same direction, Pip, we may walk together. Where are you bound for?"

"For the Temple, I think," said I.

"Don't you know?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Well," I returned, glad for once to get the better of him in cross-examination, "I do not know, for I have not made up my mind."

"You are going to dine?" said Mr. Jaggers. "You don't mind admitting that, I suppose?"

"No," I returned, "I don't mind admitting that."

"And are not engaged?"

"I don't mind admitting also that I am not engaged."

"Then," said Mr. Jaggers, "come and dine with me."

I was going to excuse myself, when he added, "Wemmick's coming." So I changed my excuse into an acceptance,—the few words I had uttered, serving for the beginning of either,—and we went along Cheapside and slanted off to Little Britain, while the lights were springing up brilliantly in the shop windows, and the street lamp-lighters, scarcely finding ground enough to plant their ladders on in the midst of the afternoon's bustle, were skipping up and down and running in and out, opening more red eyes in the gathering fog than my rushlight tower at the Hummums had opened white

eyes in the ghostly wall.

At the office in Little Britain there was the usual letter-writing, hand-washing, candle-snuffing, and safe-locking, that closed the business of the day. As I stood idle by Mr. Jaggers's fire, its rising and falling flame made the two casts on the shelf look as if they were playing a diabolical game at bo-peep with me; while the pair of coarse, fat office candles that dimly lighted Mr. Jaggers as he wrote in a corner were decorated with dirty winding-sheets, as if in remembrance of a host of hanged clients.

We went to Gerrard Street, all three together, in a hackney-coach: And, as soon as we got there, dinner was served. Although I should not have thought of making, in that place, the most distant reference by so much as a look to Wemmick's Walworth sentiments, yet I should have had no objection to catching his eye now and then in a friendly way. But it was not to be done. He turned his eyes on Mr. Jaggers whenever he raised them from the table, and was as dry and distant to me as if there were twin Wemmicks, and this was the wrong one.

"Did you send that note of Miss Havisham's to Mr. Pip, Wemmick?" Mr. Jaggers asked, soon after we began dinner.

"No, sir," returned Wemmick; "it was going by post, when you brought Mr. Pip into the office. Here it is." He handed it to his principal instead of to me.

"It's a note of two lines, Pip," said Mr. Jaggers, handing it on, "sent up to me by Miss Havisham on account of her not being sure of your address. She tells me that she wants to see you on a little matter of business you mentioned to her. You'll go down?"

"Yes," said I, casting my eyes over the note, which was exactly in those terms.

"When do you think of going down?"

"I have an impending engagement," said I, glancing at Wemmick, who was putting fish into the post-office, "that renders me rather uncertain of my time. At once, I think."

"If Mr. Pip has the intention of going at once," said Wemmick to Mr. Jaggers, "he needn't write an answer, you know."

Receiving this as an intimation that it was best not to delay, I settled that I would go to-morrow, and said so. Wemmick drank a glass of wine, and looked with a grimly satisfied air at Mr. Jaggers, but not at me.

“So, Pip! Our friend the Spider,” said Mr. Jaggers, “has played his cards. He has won the pool.”

It was as much as I could do to assent.

“Hah! He is a promising fellow—in his way—but he may not have it all his own way. The stronger will win in the end, but the stronger has to be found out first. If he should turn to, and beat her—”

“Surely,” I interrupted, with a burning face and heart, “you do not seriously think that he is scoundrel enough for that, Mr. Jaggers?”

“I didn’t say so, Pip. I am putting a case. If he should turn to and beat her, he may possibly get the strength on his side; if it should be a question of intellect, he certainly will not. It would be chance work to give an opinion how a fellow of that sort will turn out in such circumstances, because it’s a toss-up between two results.”

“May I ask what they are?”

“A fellow like our friend the Spider,” answered Mr. Jaggers, “either beats or cringes. He may cringe and growl, or cringe and not growl; but he either beats or cringes. Ask Wemmick his opinion.”

“Either beats or cringes,” said Wemmick, not at all addressing himself to me.

“So here’s to Mrs. Bentley Drummle,” said Mr. Jaggers, taking a decanter of choicer wine from his dumb-waiter, and filling for each of us and for himself, “and may the question of supremacy be settled to the lady’s satisfaction! To the satisfaction of the lady and the gentleman, it never will be. Now, Molly, Molly, Molly, Molly, how slow you are to-day!”

She was at his elbow when he addressed her, putting a dish upon the table. As she withdrew her hands from it, she fell back a step or two, nervously muttering some excuse. And a certain action of her fingers, as she spoke, arrested my attention.

“What’s the matter?” said Mr. Jaggers.

“Nothing. Only the subject we were speaking of,” said I, “was rather painful to me.”

The action of her fingers was like the action of knitting. She stood looking at her master, not understanding whether she was free to go, or whether he had more to say to her and would call her back if she did go. Her look was very intent. Surely, I had seen exactly such eyes and such hands on a memorable occasion very lately!

He dismissed her, and she glided out of the room. But she remained before me as plainly as if she were still there. I looked at those hands, I looked at those eyes, I looked at that flowing hair; and I compared them with other hands, other eyes, other hair, that I knew of, and with what those might be after twenty years of a brutal husband and a stormy life. I looked again at those hands and eyes of the housekeeper, and thought of the inexplicable feeling that had come over me when I last walked—not alone—in the ruined garden, and through the deserted brewery. I thought how the same feeling had come back when I saw a face looking at me, and a hand waving to me from a stage-coach window; and how it had come back again and had flashed about me like lightning, when I had passed in a carriage—not alone—through a sudden glare of light in a dark street. I thought how one link of association had helped that identification in the theatre, and how such a link, wanting before, had been riveted for me now, when I had passed by a chance swift from Estella's name to the fingers with their knitting action, and the attentive eyes. And I felt absolutely certain that this woman was Estella's mother.

Mr. Jaggers had seen me with Estella, and was not likely to have missed the sentiments I had been at no pains to conceal. He nodded when I said the subject was painful to me, clapped me on the back, put round the wine again, and went on with his dinner.

Only twice more did the housekeeper reappear, and then her stay in the room was very short, and Mr. Jaggers was sharp with her. But her hands were Estella's hands, and her eyes were Estella's eyes, and if she had reappeared a hundred times I could have been neither more sure nor less sure that my conviction was the truth.

It was a dull evening, for Wemmick drew his wine, when it came round, quite as a matter of business,—just as he might have drawn his salary when that came round,—and with his eyes on his chief, sat in a state of perpetual readiness for cross-examination. As to the quantity of wine, his post-office was as indifferent and ready as any other post-office for its quantity of letters. From my point of view, he was the wrong twin all the time, and only externally like the Wemmick of Walworth.

We took our leave early, and left together. Even when we were groping among Mr. Jaggers's stock of boots for our hats, I felt that the right twin was on his way back; and we had not gone half a dozen yards down Gerrard

Street in the Walworth direction, before I found that I was walking arm in arm with the right twin, and that the wrong twin had evaporated into the evening air.

"Well!" said Wemmick, "that's over! He's a wonderful man, without his living likeness; but I feel that I have to screw myself up when I dine with him,—and I dine more comfortably unscrewed."

I felt that this was a good statement of the case, and told him so.

"Wouldn't say it to anybody but yourself," he answered. "I know that what is said between you and me goes no further."

I asked him if he had ever seen Miss Havisham's adopted daughter, Mrs. Bentley Drummle. He said no. To avoid being too abrupt, I then spoke of the Aged and of Miss Skiffins. He looked rather sly when I mentioned Miss Skiffins, and stopped in the street to blow his nose, with a roll of the head, and a flourish not quite free from latent boastfulness.

"Wemmick," said I, "do you remember telling me, before I first went to Mr. Jaggers's private house, to notice that housekeeper?"

"Did I?" he replied. "Ah, I dare say I did. Deuce take me," he added, suddenly, "I know I did. I find I am not quite unscrewed yet."

"A wild beast tamed, you called her."

"And what do you call her?"

"The same. How did Mr. Jaggers tame her, Wemmick?"

"That's his secret. She has been with him many a long year."

"I wish you would tell me her story. I feel a particular interest in being acquainted with it. You know that what is said between you and me goes no further."

"Well!" Wemmick replied, "I don't know her story,—that is, I don't know all of it. But what I do know I'll tell you. We are in our private and personal capacities, of course."

"Of course."

"A score or so of years ago, that woman was tried at the Old Bailey for murder, and was acquitted. She was a very handsome young woman, and I believe had some gypsy blood in her. Anyhow, it was hot enough when it was up, as you may suppose."

"But she was acquitted."

"Mr. Jaggers was for her," pursued Wemmick, with a look full of meaning, "and worked the case in a way quite astonishing. It was a

desperate case, and it was comparatively early days with him then, and he worked it to general admiration; in fact, it may almost be said to have made him. He worked it himself at the police-office, day after day for many days, contending against even a committal; and at the trial where he couldn't work it himself, sat under counsel, and—every one knew—put in all the salt and pepper. The murdered person was a woman,—a woman a good ten years older, very much larger, and very much stronger. It was a case of jealousy. They both led tramping lives, and this woman in Gerrard Street here had been married very young, over the broomstick (as we say), to a tramping man, and was a perfect fury in point of jealousy. The murdered woman,—more a match for the man, certainly, in point of years—was found dead in a barn near Hounslow Heath. There had been a violent struggle, perhaps a fight. She was bruised and scratched and torn, and had been held by the throat, at last, and choked. Now, there was no reasonable evidence to implicate any person but this woman, and on the improbabilities of her having been able to do it Mr. Jaggers principally rested his case. You may be sure," said Wemmick, touching me on the sleeve, "that he never dwelt upon the strength of her hands then, though he sometimes does now."

I had told Wemmick of his showing us her wrists, that day of the dinner party.

"Well, sir!" Wemmick went on; "it happened—happened, don't you see?—that this woman was so very artfully dressed from the time of her apprehension, that she looked much slighter than she really was; in particular, her sleeves are always remembered to have been so skilfully contrived that her arms had quite a delicate look. She had only a bruise or two about her,—nothing for a tramp,—but the backs of her hands were lacerated, and the question was, Was it with finger-nails? Now, Mr. Jaggers showed that she had struggled through a great lot of brambles which were not as high as her face; but which she could not have got through and kept her hands out of; and bits of those brambles were actually found in her skin and put in evidence, as well as the fact that the brambles in question were found on examination to have been broken through, and to have little shreds of her dress and little spots of blood upon them here and there. But the boldest point he made was this: it was attempted to be set up, in proof of her jealousy, that she was under strong suspicion of having, at about the time of

the murder, frantically destroyed her child by this man—some three years old—to revenge herself upon him. Mr. Jaggers worked that in this way: ‘We say these are not marks of finger-nails, but marks of brambles, and we show you the brambles. You say they are marks of finger-nails, and you set up the hypothesis that she destroyed her child. You must accept all consequences of that hypothesis. For anything we know, she may have destroyed her child, and the child in clinging to her may have scratched her hands. What then? You are not trying her for the murder of her child; why don’t you? As to this case, if you will have scratches, we say that, for anything we know, you may have accounted for them, assuming for the sake of argument that you have not invented them?’ To sum up, sir,” said Wemmick, “Mr. Jaggers was altogether too many for the jury, and they gave in.”

“Has she been in his service ever since?”

“Yes; but not only that,” said Wemmick, “she went into his service immediately after her acquittal, tamed as she is now. She has since been taught one thing and another in the way of her duties, but she was tamed from the beginning.”

“Do you remember the sex of the child?”

“Said to have been a girl.”

“You have nothing more to say to me to-night?”

“Nothing. I got your letter and destroyed it. Nothing.”

We exchanged a cordial good-night, and I went home, with new matter for my thoughts, though with no relief from the old.

Chapter XLIX

PUTTING MISS HAVISHAM'S NOTE in my pocket, that it might serve as my credentials for so soon reappearing at Satis House, in case her waywardness should lead her to express any surprise at seeing me, I went down again by the coach next day. But I alighted at the Halfway House, and breakfasted there, and walked the rest of the distance; for I sought to get into the town quietly by the unfrequented ways, and to leave it in the same manner.

The best light of the day was gone when I passed along the quiet echoing courts behind the High Street. The nooks of ruin where the old monks had once had their refectories and gardens, and where the strong walls were now pressed into the service of humble sheds and stables, were almost as silent as the old monks in their graves. The cathedral chimes had at once a sadder and a more remote sound to me, as I hurried on avoiding observation, than they had ever had before; so, the swell of the old organ was borne to my ears like funeral music; and the rooks, as they hovered about the gray tower and swung in the bare high trees of the priory garden, seemed to call to me that the place was changed, and that Estella was gone out of it for ever.

An elderly woman, whom I had seen before as one of the servants who lived in the supplementary house across the back courtyard, opened the gate. The lighted candle stood in the dark passage within, as of old, and I took it up and ascended the staircase alone. Miss Havisham was not in her own room, but was in the larger room across the landing. Looking in at the door, after knocking in vain, I saw her sitting on the hearth in a ragged chair, close before, and lost in the contemplation of, the ashy fire.

Doing as I had often done, I went in, and stood touching the old chimney-piece, where she could see me when she raised her eyes. There was an air of utter loneliness upon her, that would have moved me to pity

though she had wilfully done me a deeper injury than I could charge her with. As I stood compassionating her, and thinking how, in the progress of time, I too had come to be a part of the wrecked fortunes of that house, her eyes rested on me. She stared, and said in a low voice, “Is it real?”

“It is I, Pip. Mr. Jaggers gave me your note yesterday, and I have lost no time.”

“Thank you. Thank you.”

As I brought another of the ragged chairs to the hearth and sat down, I remarked a new expression on her face, as if she were afraid of me.

“I want,” she said, “to pursue that subject you mentioned to me when you were last here, and to show you that I am not all stone. But perhaps you can never believe, now, that there is anything human in my heart?”

When I said some reassuring words, she stretched out her tremulous right hand, as though she was going to touch me; but she recalled it again before I understood the action, or knew how to receive it.

“You said, speaking for your friend, that you could tell me how to do something useful and good. Something that you would like done, is it not?”

“Something that I would like done very much.”

“What is it?”

I began explaining to her that secret history of the partnership. I had not got far into it, when I judged from her looks that she was thinking in a discursive way of me, rather than of what I said. It seemed to be so; for, when I stopped speaking, many moments passed before she showed that she was conscious of the fact.

“Do you break off,” she asked then, with her former air of being afraid of me, “because you hate me too much to bear to speak to me?”

“No, no,” I answered, “how can you think so, Miss Havisham! I stopped because I thought you were not following what I said.”

“Perhaps I was not,” she answered, putting a hand to her head. “Begin again, and let me look at something else. Stay! Now tell me.”

She set her hand upon her stick in the resolute way that sometimes was habitual to her, and looked at the fire with a strong expression of forcing herself to attend. I went on with my explanation, and told her how I had hoped to complete the transaction out of my means, but how in this I was disappointed. That part of the subject (I reminded her) involved matters which could form no part of my explanation, for they were the weighty

secrets of another.

“So!” said she, assenting with her head, but not looking at me. “And how much money is wanting to complete the purchase?”

I was rather afraid of stating it, for it sounded a large sum. “Nine hundred pounds.”

“If I give you the money for this purpose, will you keep my secret as you have kept your own?”

“Quite as faithfully.”

“And your mind will be more at rest?”

“Much more at rest.”

“Are you very unhappy now?”

She asked this question, still without looking at me, but in an unwonted tone of sympathy. I could not reply at the moment, for my voice failed me. She put her left arm across the head of her stick, and softly laid her forehead on it.

“I am far from happy, Miss Havisham; but I have other causes of disquiet than any you know of. They are the secrets I have mentioned.”

After a little while, she raised her head, and looked at the fire again.

“It is noble in you to tell me that you have other causes of unhappiness, Is it true?”

“Too true.”

“Can I only serve you, Pip, by serving your friend? Regarding that as done, is there nothing I can do for you yourself?”

“Nothing. I thank you for the question. I thank you even more for the tone of the question. But there is nothing.”

She presently rose from her seat, and looked about the blighted room for the means of writing. There were none there, and she took from her pocket a yellow set of ivory tablets, mounted in tarnished gold, and wrote upon them with a pencil in a case of tarnished gold that hung from her neck.

“You are still on friendly terms with Mr. Jaggers?”

“Quite. I dined with him yesterday.”

“This is an authority to him to pay you that money, to lay out at your irresponsible discretion for your friend. I keep no money here; but if you would rather Mr. Jaggers knew nothing of the matter, I will send it to you.”

“Thank you, Miss Havisham; I have not the least objection to receiving it from him.”

She read me what she had written; and it was direct and clear, and evidently intended to absolve me from any suspicion of profiting by the receipt of the money. I took the tablets from her hand, and it trembled again, and it trembled more as she took off the chain to which the pencil was attached, and put it in mine. All this she did without looking at me.

"My name is on the first leaf. If you can ever write under my name, 'I forgive her,' though ever so long after my broken heart is dust pray do it!"

"O Miss Havisham," said I, "I can do it now. There have been sore mistakes; and my life has been a blind and thankless one; and I want forgiveness and direction far too much, to be bitter with you."

She turned her face to me for the first time since she had averted it, and, to my amazement, I may even add to my terror, dropped on her knees at my feet; with her folded hands raised to me in the manner in which, when her poor heart was young and fresh and whole, they must often have been raised to heaven from her mother's side.

To see her with her white hair and her worn face kneeling at my feet gave me a shock through all my frame. I entreated her to rise, and got my arms about her to help her up; but she only pressed that hand of mine which was nearest to her grasp, and hung her head over it and wept. I had never seen her shed a tear before, and, in the hope that the relief might do her good, I bent over her without speaking. She was not kneeling now, but was down upon the ground.

"O!" she cried, despairingly. "What have I done! What have I done!"

"If you mean, Miss Havisham, what have you done to injure me, let me answer. Very little. I should have loved her under any circumstances. Is she married?"

"Yes."

It was a needless question, for a new desolation in the desolate house had told me so.

"What have I done! What have I done!" She wrung her hands, and crushed her white hair, and returned to this cry over and over again. "What have I done!"

I knew not how to answer, or how to comfort her. That she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride found vengeance in, I knew full well. But that, in shutting out the light of day, she

had shut out infinitely more; that, in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that, her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker, I knew equally well. And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world?

"Until you spoke to her the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done! What have I done!" And so again, twenty, fifty times over, What had she done!

"Miss Havisham," I said, when her cry had died away, "you may dismiss me from your mind and conscience. But Estella is a different case, and if you can ever undo any scrap of what you have done amiss in keeping a part of her right nature away from her, it will be better to do that than to bemoan the past through a hundred years."

"Yes, yes, I know it. But, Pip—my dear!" There was an earnest womanly compassion for me in her new affection. "My dear! Believe this: when she first came to me, I meant to save her from misery like my own. At first, I meant no more."

"Well, well!" said I. "I hope so."

"But as she grew, and promised to be very beautiful, I gradually did worse, and with my praises, and with my jewels, and with my teachings, and with this figure of myself always before her, a warning to back and point my lessons, I stole her heart away, and put ice in its place."

"Better," I could not help saying, "to have left her a natural heart, even to be bruised or broken."

With that, Miss Havisham looked distractedly at me for a while, and then burst out again, What had she done!

"If you knew all my story," she pleaded, "you would have some compassion for me and a better understanding of me."

"Miss Havisham," I answered, as delicately as I could, "I believe I may say that I do know your story, and have known it ever since I first left this neighborhood. It has inspired me with great commiseration, and I hope I

understand it and its influences. Does what has passed between us give me any excuse for asking you a question relative to Estella? Not as she is, but as she was when she first came here?”

She was seated on the ground, with her arms on the ragged chair, and her head leaning on them. She looked full at me when I said this, and replied, “Go on.”

“Whose child was Estella?”

She shook her head.

“You don’t know?”

She shook her head again.

“But Mr. Jaggers brought her here, or sent her here?”

“Brought her here.”

“Will you tell me how that came about?”

She answered in a low whisper and with caution: “I had been shut up in these rooms a long time (I don’t know how long; you know what time the clocks keep here), when I told him that I wanted a little girl to rear and love, and save from my fate. I had first seen him when I sent for him to lay this place waste for me; having read of him in the newspapers, before I and the world parted. He told me that he would look about him for such an orphan child. One night he brought her here asleep, and I called her Estella.”

“Might I ask her age then?”

“Two or three. She herself knows nothing, but that she was left an orphan and I adopted her.”

So convinced I was of that woman’s being her mother, that I wanted no evidence to establish the fact in my own mind. But, to any mind, I thought, the connection here was clear and straight.

What more could I hope to do by prolonging the interview? I had succeeded on behalf of Herbert, Miss Havisham had told me all she knew of Estella, I had said and done what I could to ease her mind. No matter with what other words we parted; we parted.

Twilight was closing in when I went down stairs into the natural air. I called to the woman who had opened the gate when I entered, that I would not trouble her just yet, but would walk round the place before leaving. For I had a presentiment that I should never be there again, and I felt that the dying light was suited to my last view of it.

By the wilderness of casks that I had walked on long ago, and on which

the rain of years had fallen since, rotting them in many places, and leaving miniature swamps and pools of water upon those that stood on end, I made my way to the ruined garden. I went all round it; round by the corner where Herbert and I had fought our battle; round by the paths where Estella and I had walked. So cold, so lonely, so dreary all!

Taking the brewery on my way back, I raised the rusty latch of a little door at the garden end of it, and walked through. I was going out at the opposite door,—not easy to open now, for the damp wood had started and swelled, and the hinges were yielding, and the threshold was encumbered with a growth of fungus,—when I turned my head to look back. A childish association revived with wonderful force in the moment of the slight action, and I fancied that I saw Miss Havisham hanging to the beam. So strong was the impression, that I stood under the beam shuddering from head to foot before I knew it was a fancy,—though to be sure I was there in an instant.

The mournfulness of the place and time, and the great terror of this illusion, though it was but momentary, caused me to feel an indescribable awe as I came out between the open wooden gates where I had once wrung my hair after Estella had wrung my heart. Passing on into the front courtyard, I hesitated whether to call the woman to let me out at the locked gate of which she had the key, or first to go up stairs and assure myself that Miss Havisham was as safe and well as I had left her. I took the latter course and went up.

I looked into the room where I had left her, and I saw her seated in the ragged chair upon the hearth close to the fire, with her back towards me. In the moment when I was withdrawing my head to go quietly away, I saw a great flaming light spring up. In the same moment I saw her running at me, shrieking, with a whirl of fire blazing all about her, and soaring at least as many feet above her head as she was high.

I had a double-caped great-coat on, and over my arm another thick coat. That I got them off, closed with her, threw her down, and got them over her; that I dragged the great cloth from the table for the same purpose, and with it dragged down the heap of rottenness in the midst, and all the ugly things that sheltered there; that we were on the ground struggling like desperate enemies, and that the closer I covered her, the more wildly she shrieked and tried to free herself,—that this occurred I knew through the result, but not through anything I felt, or thought, or knew I did. I knew nothing until I

knew that we were on the floor by the great table, and that patches of tinder yet alight were floating in the smoky air, which, a moment ago, had been her faded bridal dress.

Then, I looked round and saw the disturbed beetles and spiders running away over the floor, and the servants coming in with breathless cries at the door. I still held her forcibly down with all my strength, like a prisoner who might escape; and I doubt if I even knew who she was, or why we had struggled, or that she had been in flames, or that the flames were out, until I saw the patches of tinder that had been her garments no longer alight but falling in a black shower around us.

She was insensible, and I was afraid to have her moved, or even touched. Assistance was sent for, and I held her until it came, as if I unreasonably fancied (I think I did) that, if I let her go, the fire would break out again and consume her. When I got up, on the surgeon's coming to her with other aid, I was astonished to see that both my hands were burnt; for, I had no knowledge of it through the sense of feeling.

On examination it was pronounced that she had received serious hurts, but that they of themselves were far from hopeless; the danger lay mainly in the nervous shock. By the surgeon's directions, her bed was carried into that room and laid upon the great table, which happened to be well suited to the dressing of her injuries. When I saw her again, an hour afterwards, she lay, indeed, where I had seen her strike her stick, and had heard her say that she would lie one day.

Though every vestige of her dress was burnt, as they told me, she still had something of her old ghastly bridal appearance; for, they had covered her to the throat with white cotton-wool, and as she lay with a white sheet loosely overlying that, the phantom air of something that had been and was changed was still upon her.

I found, on questioning the servants, that Estella was in Paris, and I got a promise from the surgeon that he would write to her by the next post. Miss Havisham's family I took upon myself; intending to communicate with Mr. Matthew Pocket only, and leave him to do as he liked about informing the rest. This I did next day, through Herbert, as soon as I returned to town.

There was a stage, that evening, when she spoke collectedly of what had happened, though with a certain terrible vivacity. Towards midnight she began to wander in her speech; and after that it gradually set in that she said

innumerable times in a low solemn voice, “What have I done!” And then, “When she first came, I meant to save her from misery like mine.” And then, “Take the pencil and write under my name, ‘I forgive her!’” She never changed the order of these three sentences, but she sometimes left out a word in one or other of them; never putting in another word, but always leaving a blank and going on to the next word.

As I could do no service there, and as I had, nearer home, that pressing reason for anxiety and fear which even her wanderings could not drive out of my mind, I decided, in the course of the night that I would return by the early morning coach, walking on a mile or so, and being taken up clear of the town. At about six o’clock of the morning, therefore, I leaned over her and touched her lips with mine, just as they said, not stopping for being touched, “Take the pencil and write under my name, ‘I forgive her.’”

Chapter L

MY HANDS HAD BEEN dressed twice or thrice in the night, and again in the morning. My left arm was a good deal burned to the elbow, and, less severely, as high as the shoulder; it was very painful, but the flames had set in that direction, and I felt thankful it was no worse. My right hand was not so badly burnt but that I could move the fingers. It was bandaged, of course, but much less inconveniently than my left hand and arm; those I carried in a sling; and I could only wear my coat like a cloak, loose over my shoulders and fastened at the neck. My hair had been caught by the fire, but not my head or face.

When Herbert had been down to Hammersmith and seen his father, he came back to me at our chambers, and devoted the day to attending on me. He was the kindest of nurses, and at stated times took off the bandages, and steeped them in the cooling liquid that was kept ready, and put them on again, with a patient tenderness that I was deeply grateful for.

At first, as I lay quiet on the sofa, I found it painfully difficult, I might say impossible, to get rid of the impression of the glare of the flames, their hurry and noise, and the fierce burning smell. If I dozed for a minute, I was awakened by Miss Havisham's cries, and by her running at me with all that height of fire above her head. This pain of the mind was much harder to strive against than any bodily pain I suffered; and Herbert, seeing that, did his utmost to hold my attention engaged.

Neither of us spoke of the boat, but we both thought of it. That was made apparent by our avoidance of the subject, and by our agreeing—without agreement—to make my recovery of the use of my hands a question of so many hours, not of so many weeks.

My first question when I saw Herbert had been of course, whether all was well down the river? As he replied in the affirmative, with perfect

confidence and cheerfulness, we did not resume the subject until the day was wearing away. But then, as Herbert changed the bandages, more by the light of the fire than by the outer light, he went back to it spontaneously.

“I sat with Provis last night, Handel, two good hours.”

“Where was Clara?”

“Dear little thing!” said Herbert. “She was up and down with Gruffandgrim all the evening. He was perpetually pegging at the floor the moment she left his sight. I doubt if he can hold out long, though. What with rum and pepper,—and pepper and rum,—I should think his pegging must be nearly over.”

“And then you will be married, Herbert?”

“How can I take care of the dear child otherwise?— Lay your arm out upon the back of the sofa, my dear boy, and I’ll sit down here, and get the bandage off so gradually that you shall not know when it comes. I was speaking of Provis. Do you know, Handel, he improves?”

“I said to you I thought he was softened when I last saw him.”

“So you did. And so he is. He was very communicative last night, and told me more of his life. You remember his breaking off here about some woman that he had had great trouble with.— Did I hurt you?”

I had started, but not under his touch. His words had given me a start.

“I had forgotten that, Herbert, but I remember it now you speak of it.”

“Well! He went into that part of his life, and a dark wild part it is. Shall I tell you? Or would it worry you just now?”

“Tell me by all means. Every word.”

Herbert bent forward to look at me more nearly, as if my reply had been rather more hurried or more eager than he could quite account for. “Your head is cool?” he said, touching it.

“Quite,” said I. “Tell me what Provis said, my dear Herbert.”

“It seems,” said Herbert, “—there’s a bandage off most charmingly, and now comes the cool one,—makes you shrink at first, my poor dear fellow, don’t it? but it will be comfortable presently,—it seems that the woman was a young woman, and a jealous woman, and a revengeful woman; revengeful, Handel, to the last degree.”

“To what last degree?”

“Murder.— Does it strike too cold on that sensitive place?”

“I don’t feel it. How did she murder? Whom did she murder?”

“Why, the deed may not have merited quite so terrible a name,” said Herbert, “but, she was tried for it, and Mr. Jaggers defended her, and the reputation of that defence first made his name known to Provis. It was another and a stronger woman who was the victim, and there had been a struggle—in a barn. Who began it, or how fair it was, or how unfair, may be doubtful; but how it ended is certainly not doubtful, for the victim was found throttled.”

“Was the woman brought in guilty?”

“No; she was acquitted.— My poor Handel, I hurt you!”

“It is impossible to be gentler, Herbert. Yes? What else?”

“This acquitted young woman and Provis had a little child; a little child of whom Provis was exceedingly fond. On the evening of the very night when the object of her jealousy was strangled as I tell you, the young woman presented herself before Provis for one moment, and swore that she would destroy the child (which was in her possession), and he should never see it again; then she vanished.— There’s the worst arm comfortably in the sling once more, and now there remains but the right hand, which is a far easier job. I can do it better by this light than by a stronger, for my hand is steadiest when I don’t see the poor blistered patches too distinctly.— You don’t think your breathing is affected, my dear boy? You seem to breathe quickly.”

“Perhaps I do, Herbert. Did the woman keep her oath?”

“There comes the darkest part of Provis’s life. She did.”

“That is, he says she did.”

“Why, of course, my dear boy,” returned Herbert, in a tone of surprise, and again bending forward to get a nearer look at me. “He says it all. I have no other information.”

“No, to be sure.”

“Now, whether,” pursued Herbert, “he had used the child’s mother ill, or whether he had used the child’s mother well, Provis doesn’t say; but she had shared some four or five years of the wretched life he described to us at this fireside, and he seems to have felt pity for her, and forbearance towards her. Therefore, fearing he should be called upon to depose about this destroyed child, and so be the cause of her death, he hid himself (much as he grieved for the child), kept himself dark, as he says, out of the way and out of the trial, and was only vaguely talked of as a certain man called Abel, out of

whom the jealousy arose. After the acquittal she disappeared, and thus he lost the child and the child's mother."

"I want to ask—"

"A moment, my dear boy, and I have done. That evil genius, Compeyson, the worst of scoundrels among many scoundrels, knowing of his keeping out of the way at that time and of his reasons for doing so, of course afterwards held the knowledge over his head as a means of keeping him poorer and working him harder. It was clear last night that this barbed the point of Provis's animosity."

"I want to know," said I, "and particularly, Herbert, whether he told you when this happened?"

"Particularly? Let me remember, then, what he said as to that. His expression was, 'a round score o' year ago, and a'most directly after I took up wi' Compeyson.' How old were you when you came upon him in the little churchyard?"

"I think in my seventh year."

"Ay. It had happened some three or four years then, he said, and you brought into his mind the little girl so tragically lost, who would have been about your age."

"Herbert," said I, after a short silence, in a hurried way, "can you see me best by the light of the window, or the light of the fire?"

"By the firelight," answered Herbert, coming close again.

"Look at me."

"I do look at you, my dear boy."

"Touch me."

"I do touch you, my dear boy."

"You are not afraid that I am in any fever, or that my head is much disordered by the accident of last night?"

"N-no, my dear boy," said Herbert, after taking time to examine me. "You are rather excited, but you are quite yourself."

"I know I am quite myself. And the man we have in hiding down the river, is Estella's Father."

Chapter LI

WHAT PURPOSE I HAD in view when I was hot on tracing out and proving Estella's parentage, I cannot say. It will presently be seen that the question was not before me in a distinct shape until it was put before me by a wiser head than my own.

But when Herbert and I had held our momentous conversation, I was seized with a feverish conviction that I ought to hunt the matter down,—that I ought not to let it rest, but that I ought to see Mr. Jaggers, and come at the bare truth. I really do not know whether I felt that I did this for Estella's sake, or whether I was glad to transfer to the man in whose preservation I was so much concerned some rays of the romantic interest that had so long surrounded me. Perhaps the latter possibility may be the nearer to the truth.

Any way, I could scarcely be withheld from going out to Gerrard Street that night. Herbert's representations that, if I did, I should probably be laid up and stricken useless, when our fugitive's safety would depend upon me, alone restrained my impatience. On the understanding, again and again reiterated, that, come what would, I was to go to Mr. Jaggers to-morrow, I at length submitted to keep quiet, and to have my hurts looked after, and to stay at home. Early next morning we went out together, and at the corner of Giltspur Street by Smithfield, I left Herbert to go his way into the City, and took my way to Little Britain.

There were periodical occasions when Mr. Jaggers and Wemmick went over the office accounts, and checked off the vouchers, and put all things straight. On these occasions, Wemmick took his books and papers into Mr. Jaggers's room, and one of the up-stairs clerks came down into the outer office. Finding such clerk on Wemmick's post that morning, I knew what was going on; but I was not sorry to have Mr. Jaggers and Wemmick together, as Wemmick would then hear for himself that I said nothing to

compromise him.

My appearance, with my arm bandaged and my coat loose over my shoulders, favored my object. Although I had sent Mr. Jaggers a brief account of the accident as soon as I had arrived in town, yet I had to give him all the details now; and the speciality of the occasion caused our talk to be less dry and hard, and less strictly regulated by the rules of evidence, than it had been before. While I described the disaster, Mr. Jaggers stood, according to his wont, before the fire. Wemmick leaned back in his chair, staring at me, with his hands in the pockets of his trousers, and his pen put horizontally into the post. The two brutal casts, always inseparable in my mind from the official proceedings, seemed to be congestively considering whether they didn't smell fire at the present moment.

My narrative finished, and their questions exhausted, I then produced Miss Havisham's authority to receive the nine hundred pounds for Herbert. Mr. Jaggers's eyes retired a little deeper into his head when I handed him the tablets, but he presently handed them over to Wemmick, with instructions to draw the check for his signature. While that was in course of being done, I looked on at Wemmick as he wrote, and Mr. Jaggers, poising and swaying himself on his well-polished boots, looked on at me. "I am sorry, Pip," said he, as I put the check in my pocket, when he had signed it, "that we do nothing for you."

"Miss Havisham was good enough to ask me," I returned, "whether she could do nothing for me, and I told her No."

"Everybody should know his own business," said Mr. Jaggers. And I saw Wemmick's lips form the words "portable property."

"I should not have told her No, if I had been you," said Mr. Jaggers; "but every man ought to know his own business best."

"Every man's business," said Wemmick, rather reproachfully towards me, "is portable property."

As I thought the time was now come for pursuing the theme I had at heart, I said, turning on Mr. Jaggers:—

"I did ask something of Miss Havisham, however, sir. I asked her to give me some information relative to her adopted daughter, and she gave me all she possessed."

"Did she?" said Mr. Jaggers, bending forward to look at his boots and then straightening himself. "Hah! I don't think I should have done so, if I

had been Miss Havisham. But she ought to know her own business best."

"I know more of the history of Miss Havisham's adopted child than Miss Havisham herself does, sir. I know her mother."

Mr. Jaggers looked at me inquiringly, and repeated "Mother?"

"I have seen her mother within these three days."

"Yes?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"And so have you, sir. And you have seen her still more recently."

"Yes?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Perhaps I know more of Estella's history than even you do," said I. "I know her father too."

A certain stop that Mr. Jaggers came to in his manner—he was too self-possessed to change his manner, but he could not help its being brought to an indefinably attentive stop—assured me that he did not know who her father was. This I had strongly suspected from Provis's account (as Herbert had repeated it) of his having kept himself dark; which I pieced on to the fact that he himself was not Mr. Jaggers's client until some four years later, and when he could have no reason for claiming his identity. But, I could not be sure of this unconsciousness on Mr. Jaggers's part before, though I was quite sure of it now.

"So! You know the young lady's father, Pip?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Yes," I replied, "and his name is Provis—from New South Wales."

Even Mr. Jaggers started when I said those words. It was the slightest start that could escape a man, the most carefully repressed and the sooner checked, but he did start, though he made it a part of the action of taking out his pocket-handkerchief. How Wemmick received the announcement I am unable to say; for I was afraid to look at him just then, lest Mr. Jaggers's sharpness should detect that there had been some communication unknown to him between us.

"And on what evidence, Pip," asked Mr. Jaggers, very coolly, as he paused with his handkerchief half way to his nose, "does Provis make this claim?"

"He does not make it," said I, "and has never made it, and has no knowledge or belief that his daughter is in existence."

For once, the powerful pocket-handkerchief failed. My reply was so Unexpected, that Mr. Jaggers put the handkerchief back into his pocket without completing the usual performance, folded his arms, and looked

with stern attention at me, though with an immovable face.

Then I told him all I knew, and how I knew it; with the one reservation that I left him to infer that I knew from Miss Havisham what I in fact knew from Wemmick. I was very careful indeed as to that. Nor did I look towards Wemmick until I had finished all I had to tell, and had been for some time silently meeting Mr. Jaggers's look. When I did at last turn my eyes in Wemmick's direction, I found that he had unposted his pen, and was intent upon the table before him.

"Hah!" said Mr. Jaggers at last, as he moved towards the papers on the table. "What item was it you were at, Wemmick, when Mr. Pip came in?"

But I could not submit to be thrown off in that way, and I made a passionate, almost an indignant appeal, to him to be more frank and manly with me. I reminded him of the false hopes into which I had lapsed, the length of time they had lasted, and the discovery I had made: and I hinted at the danger that weighed upon my spirits. I represented myself as being surely worthy of some little confidence from him, in return for the confidence I had just now imparted. I said that I did not blame him, or suspect him, or mistrust him, but I wanted assurance of the truth from him. And if he asked me why I wanted it, and why I thought I had any right to it, I would tell him, little as he cared for such poor dreams, that I had loved Estella dearly and long, and that although I had lost her, and must live a bereaved life, whatever concerned her was still nearer and dearer to me than anything else in the world. And seeing that Mr. Jaggers stood quite still and silent, and apparently quite obdurate, under this appeal, I turned to Wemmick, and said, "Wemmick, I know you to be a man with a gentle heart. I have seen your pleasant home, and your old father, and all the innocent, cheerful playful ways with which you refresh your business life. And I entreat you to say a word for me to Mr. Jaggers, and to represent to him that, all circumstances considered, he ought to be more open with me!"

I have never seen two men look more oddly at one another than Mr. Jaggers and Wemmick did after this apostrophe. At first, a misgiving crossed me that Wemmick would be instantly dismissed from his employment; but it melted as I saw Mr. Jaggers relax into something like a smile, and Wemmick become bolder.

"What's all this?" said Mr. Jaggers. "You with an old father, and you with pleasant and playful ways?"

“Well!” returned Wemmick. “If I don’t bring ’em here, what does it matter?”

“Pip,” said Mr. Jaggers, laying his hand upon my arm, and smiling openly, “this man must be the most cunning impostor in all London.”

“Not a bit of it,” returned Wemmick, growing bolder and bolder. “I think you’re another.”

Again they exchanged their former odd looks, each apparently still distrustful that the other was taking him in.

“You with a pleasant home?” said Mr. Jaggers.

“Since it don’t interfere with business,” returned Wemmick, “let it be so. Now, I look at you, sir, I shouldn’t wonder if you might be planning and contriving to have a pleasant home of your own one of these days, when you’re tired of all this work.”

Mr. Jaggers nodded his head retrospectively two or three times, and actually drew a sigh. “Pip,” said he, “we won’t talk about ‘poor dreams;’ you know more about such things than I, having much fresher experience of that kind. But now about this other matter. I’ll put a case to you. Mind! I admit nothing.”

He waited for me to declare that I quite understood that he expressly said that he admitted nothing.

“Now, Pip,” said Mr. Jaggers, “put this case. Put the case that a woman, under such circumstances as you have mentioned, held her child concealed, and was obliged to communicate the fact to her legal adviser, on his representing to her that he must know, with an eye to the latitude of his defence, how the fact stood about that child. Put the case that, at the same time he held a trust to find a child for an eccentric rich lady to adopt and bring up.”

“I follow you, sir.”

“Put the case that he lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children was their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. Put the case that he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen; put the case that he habitually knew of their being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman, and growing up to be hanged. Put the case that pretty nigh all the children he saw in his daily business life he had reason to look upon as so much spawn, to develop into

the fish that were to come to his net,—to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, bedevilled somehow."

"I follow you, sir."

"Put the case, Pip, that here was one pretty little child out of the heap who could be saved; whom the father believed dead, and dared make no stir about; as to whom, over the mother, the legal adviser had this power: 'I know what you did, and how you did it. You came so and so, you did such and such things to divert suspicion. I have tracked you through it all, and I tell it you all. Part with the child, unless it should be necessary to produce it to clear you, and then it shall be produced. Give the child into my hands, and I will do my best to bring you off. If you are saved, your child is saved too; if you are lost, your child is still saved.' Put the case that this was done, and that the woman was cleared."

"I understand you perfectly."

"But that I make no admissions?"

"That you make no admissions." And Wemmick repeated, "No admissions."

"Put the case, Pip, that passion and the terror of death had a little shaken the woman's intellects, and that when she was set at liberty, she was scared out of the ways of the world, and went to him to be sheltered. Put the case that he took her in, and that he kept down the old, wild, violent nature whenever he saw an inkling of its breaking out, by asserting his power over her in the old way. Do you comprehend the imaginary case?"

"Quite."

"Put the case that the child grew up, and was married for money. That the mother was still living. That the father was still living. That the mother and father, unknown to one another, were dwelling within so many miles, furlongs, yards if you like, of one another. That the secret was still a secret, except that you had got wind of it. Put that last case to yourself very carefully."

"I do."

"I ask Wemmick to put it to himself very carefully."

And Wemmick said, "I do."

"For whose sake would you reveal the secret? For the father's? I think he would not be much the better for the mother. For the mother's? I think if she had done such a deed she would be safer where she was. For the

daughter's? I think it would hardly serve her to establish her parentage for the information of her husband, and to drag her back to disgrace, after an escape of twenty years, pretty secure to last for life. But add the case that you had loved her, Pip, and had made her the subject of those 'poor dreams' which have, at one time or another, been in the heads of more men than you think likely, then I tell you that you had better—and would much sooner when you had thought well of it—chop off that bandaged left hand of yours with your bandaged right hand, and then pass the chopper on to Wemmick there, to cut that off too."

I looked at Wemmick, whose face was very grave. He gravely touched his lips with his forefinger. I did the same. Mr. Jaggers did the same. "Now, Wemmick," said the latter then, resuming his usual manner, "what item was it you were at when Mr. Pip came in?"

Standing by for a little, while they were at work, I observed that the odd looks they had cast at one another were repeated several times: with this difference now, that each of them seemed suspicious, not to say conscious, of having shown himself in a weak and unprofessional light to the other. For this reason, I suppose, they were now inflexible with one another; Mr. Jaggers being highly dictatorial, and Wemmick obstinately justifying himself whenever there was the smallest point in abeyance for a moment. I had never seen them on such ill terms; for generally they got on very well indeed together.

But they were both happily relieved by the opportune appearance of Mike, the client with the fur cap and the habit of wiping his nose on his sleeve, whom I had seen on the very first day of my appearance within those walls. This individual, who, either in his own person or in that of some member of his family, seemed to be always in trouble (which in that place meant Newgate), called to announce that his eldest daughter was taken up on suspicion of shoplifting. As he imparted this melancholy circumstance to Wemmick, Mr. Jaggers standing magisterially before the fire and taking no share in the proceedings, Mike's eye happened to twinkle with a tear.

"What are you about?" demanded Wemmick, with the utmost indignation. "What do you come snivelling here for?"

"I didn't go to do it, Mr. Wemmick."

"You did," said Wemmick. "How dare you? You're not in a fit state to

come here, if you can’t come here without spluttering like a bad pen. What do you mean by it?”

“A man can’t help his feelings, Mr. Wemmick,” pleaded Mike.

“His what?” demanded Wemmick, quite savagely. “Say that again!”

“Now look here my man,” said Mr. Jaggers, advancing a step, and pointing to the door. “Get out of this office. I’ll have no feelings here. Get out.”

“It serves you right,” said Wemmick, “Get out.”

So, the unfortunate Mike very humbly withdrew, and Mr. Jaggers and Wemmick appeared to have re-established their good understanding, and went to work again with an air of refreshment upon them as if they had just had lunch.

Chapter LII

FROM LITTLE BRITAIN I went, with my check in my pocket, to Miss Skiffins's brother, the accountant; and Miss Skiffins's brother, the accountant, going straight to Clarriker's and bringing Clarriker to me, I had the great satisfaction of concluding that arrangement. It was the only good thing I had done, and the only completed thing I had done, since I was first apprised of my great expectations.

Clarriker informing me on that occasion that the affairs of the House were steadily progressing, that he would now be able to establish a small branch-house in the East which was much wanted for the extension of the business, and that Herbert in his new partnership capacity would go out and take charge of it, I found that I must have prepared for a separation from my friend, even though my own affairs had been more settled. And now, indeed, I felt as if my last anchor were loosening its hold, and I should soon be driving with the winds and waves.

But there was recompense in the joy with which Herbert would come home of a night and tell me of these changes, little imagining that he told me no news, and would sketch airy pictures of himself conducting Clara Barley to the land of the Arabian Nights, and of me going out to join them (with a caravan of camels, I believe), and of our all going up the Nile and seeing wonders. Without being sanguine as to my own part in those bright plans, I felt that Herbert's way was clearing fast, and that old Bill Barley had but to stick to his pepper and rum, and his daughter would soon be happily provided for.

We had now got into the month of March. My left arm, though it presented no bad symptoms, took, in the natural course, so long to heal that I was still unable to get a coat on. My right arm was tolerably restored; disfigured, but fairly serviceable.

On a Monday morning, when Herbert and I were at breakfast, I received the following letter from Wemmick by the post.

"Walworth. Burn this as soon as read. Early in the week, or say Wednesday, you might do what you know of, if you felt disposed to try it. Now burn."

When I had shown this to Herbert and had put it in the fire—but not before we had both got it by heart—we considered what to do. For, of course my being disabled could now be no longer kept out of view.

"I have thought it over again and again," said Herbert, "and I think I know a better course than taking a Thames waterman. Take Startop. A good fellow, a skilled hand, fond of us, and enthusiastic and honorable."

I had thought of him more than once.

"But how much would you tell him, Herbert?"

"It is necessary to tell him very little. Let him suppose it a mere freak, but a secret one, until the morning comes: then let him know that there is urgent reason for your getting Provis aboard and away. You go with him?"

"No doubt."

"Where?"

It had seemed to me, in the many anxious considerations I had given the point, almost indifferent what port we made for,—Hamburg, Rotterdam, Antwerp,—the place signified little, so that he was out of England. Any foreign steamer that fell in our way and would take us up would do. I had always proposed to myself to get him well down the river in the boat; certainly well beyond Gravesend, which was a critical place for search or inquiry if suspicion were afoot. As foreign steamers would leave London at about the time of high-water, our plan would be to get down the river by a previous ebb-tide, and lie by in some quiet spot until we could pull off to one. The time when one would be due where we lay, wherever that might be, could be calculated pretty nearly, if we made inquiries beforehand.

Herbert assented to all this, and we went out immediately after breakfast to pursue our investigations. We found that a steamer for Hamburg was likely to suit our purpose best, and we directed our thoughts chiefly to that vessel. But we noted down what other foreign steamers would leave London with the same tide, and we satisfied ourselves that we knew the build and color of each. We then separated for a few hours: I, to get at once such passports as were necessary; Herbert, to see Startop at his lodgings.

We both did what we had to do without any hindrance, and when we met again at one o’clock reported it done. I, for my part, was prepared with passports; Herbert had seen Startop, and he was more than ready to join.

Those two should pull a pair of oars, we settled, and I would steer; our charge would be sitter, and keep quiet; as speed was not our object, we should make way enough. We arranged that Herbert should not come home to dinner before going to Mill Pond Bank that evening; that he should not go there at all to-morrow evening, Tuesday; that he should prepare Provis to come down to some stairs hard by the house, on Wednesday, when he saw us approach, and not sooner; that all the arrangements with him should be concluded that Monday night; and that he should be communicated with no more in any way, until we took him on board.

These precautions well understood by both of us, I went home.

On opening the outer door of our chambers with my key, I found a letter in the box, directed to me; a very dirty letter, though not ill-written. It had been delivered by hand (of course, since I left home), and its contents were these:—

“If you are not afraid to come to the old marshes to-night or to-morrow night at nine, and to come to the little sluice-house by the limekiln, you had better come. If you want information regarding your uncle Provis, you had much better come and tell no one, and lose no time. You must come alone. Bring this with you.”

I had had load enough upon my mind before the receipt of this strange letter. What to do now, I could not tell. And the worst was, that I must decide quickly, or I should miss the afternoon coach, which would take me down in time for to-night. To-morrow night I could not think of going, for it would be too close upon the time of the flight. And again, for anything I knew, the proffered information might have some important bearing on the flight itself.

If I had had ample time for consideration, I believe I should still have gone. Having hardly any time for consideration,—my watch showing me that the coach started within half an hour,—I resolved to go. I should certainly not have gone, but for the reference to my Uncle Provis. That, coming on Wemmick’s letter and the morning’s busy preparation, turned the scale.

It is so difficult to become clearly possessed of the contents of almost

any letter, in a violent hurry, that I had to read this mysterious epistle again twice, before its injunction to me to be secret got mechanically into my mind. Yielding to it in the same mechanical kind of way, I left a note in pencil for Herbert, telling him that as I should be so soon going away, I knew not for how long, I had decided to hurry down and back, to ascertain for myself how Miss Havisham was faring. I had then barely time to get my great-coat, lock up the chambers, and make for the coach-office by the short by-ways. If I had taken a hackney-chariot and gone by the streets, I should have missed my aim; going as I did, I caught the coach just as it came out of the yard. I was the only inside passenger, jolting away knee-deep in straw, when I came to myself.

For I really had not been myself since the receipt of the letter; it had so bewildered me, ensuing on the hurry of the morning. The morning hurry and flutter had been great; for, long and anxiously as I had waited for Wemmick, his hint had come like a surprise at last. And now I began to wonder at myself for being in the coach, and to doubt whether I had sufficient reason for being there, and to consider whether I should get out presently and go back, and to argue against ever heeding an anonymous communication, and, in short, to pass through all those phases of contradiction and indecision to which I suppose very few hurried people are strangers. Still, the reference to Provis by name mastered everything. I reasoned as I had reasoned already without knowing it,—if that be reasoning,—in case any harm should befall him through my not going, how could I ever forgive myself!

It was dark before we got down, and the journey seemed long and dreary to me, who could see little of it inside, and who could not go outside in my disabled state. Avoiding the Blue Boar, I put up at an inn of minor reputation down the town, and ordered some dinner. While it was preparing, I went to Satis House and inquired for Miss Havisham; she was still very ill, though considered something better.

My inn had once been a part of an ancient ecclesiastical house, and I dined in a little octagonal common-room, like a font. As I was not able to cut my dinner, the old landlord with a shining bald head did it for me. This bringing us into conversation, he was so good as to entertain me with my own story,—of course with the popular feature that Pumblechook was my earliest benefactor and the founder of my fortunes.

“Do you know the young man?” said I.

“Know him!” repeated the landlord. “Ever since he was—no height at all.”

“Does he ever come back to this neighborhood?”

“Ay, he comes back,” said the landlord, “to his great friends, now and again, and gives the cold shoulder to the man that made him.”

“What man is that?”

“Him that I speak of,” said the landlord. “Mr. Pumblechook.”

“Is he ungrateful to no one else?”

“No doubt he would be, if he could,” returned the landlord, “but he can’t. And why? Because Pumblechook done everything for him.”

“Does Pumblechook say so?”

“Say so!” replied the landlord. “He han’t no call to say so.”

“But does he say so?”

“It would turn a man’s blood to white wine winegar to hear him tell of it, sir,” said the landlord.

I thought, “Yet Joe, dear Joe, you never tell of it. Long-suffering and loving Joe, you never complain. Nor you, sweet-tempered Biddy!”

“Your appetite’s been touched like by your accident,” said the landlord, glancing at the bandaged arm under my coat. “Try a tenderer bit.”

“No, thank you,” I replied, turning from the table to brood over the fire. “I can eat no more. Please take it away.”

I had never been struck at so keenly, for my thanklessness to Joe, as through the brazen impostor Pumblechook. The falser he, the truer Joe; the meaner he, the nobler Joe.

My heart was deeply and most deservedly humbled as I mused over the fire for an hour or more. The striking of the clock aroused me, but not from my dejection or remorse, and I got up and had my coat fastened round my neck, and went out. I had previously sought in my pockets for the letter, that I might refer to it again; but I could not find it, and was uneasy to think that it must have been dropped in the straw of the coach. I knew very well, however, that the appointed place was the little sluice-house by the limekiln on the marshes, and the hour nine. Towards the marshes I now went straight, having no time to spare.

Chapter LIII

IT WAS A DARK NIGHT, though the full moon rose as I left the enclosed lands, and passed out upon the marshes. Beyond their dark line there was a ribbon of clear sky, hardly broad enough to hold the red large moon. In a few minutes she had ascended out of that clear field, in among the piled mountains of cloud.

There was a melancholy wind, and the marshes were very dismal. A stranger would have found them insupportable, and even to me they were so oppressive that I hesitated, half inclined to go back. But I knew them well, and could have found my way on a far darker night, and had no excuse for returning, being there. So, having come there against my inclination, I went on against it.

The direction that I took was not that in which my old home lay, nor that in which we had pursued the convicts. My back was turned towards the distant Hulks as I walked on, and, though I could see the old lights away on the spits of sand, I saw them over my shoulder. I knew the limekiln as well as I knew the old Battery, but they were miles apart; so that, if a light had been burning at each point that night, there would have been a long strip of the blank horizon between the two bright specks.

At first, I had to shut some gates after me, and now and then to stand still while the cattle that were lying in the banked-up pathway arose and blundered down among the grass and reeds. But after a little while I seemed to have the whole flats to myself.

It was another half-hour before I drew near to the kiln. The lime was burning with a sluggish stifling smell, but the fires were made up and left, and no workmen were visible. Hard by was a small stone-quarry. It lay directly in my way, and had been worked that day, as I saw by the tools and barrows that were lying about.

Coming up again to the marsh level out of this excavation,—for the rude path lay through it,—I saw a light in the old sluice-house. I quickened my pace, and knocked at the door with my hand. Waiting for some reply, I looked about me, noticing how the sluice was abandoned and broken, and how the house—of wood with a tiled roof—would not be proof against the weather much longer, if it were so even now, and how the mud and ooze were coated with lime, and how the choking vapor of the kiln crept in a ghostly way towards me. Still there was no answer, and I knocked again. No answer still, and I tried the latch.

It rose under my hand, and the door yielded. Looking in, I saw a lighted candle on a table, a bench, and a mattress on a truckle bedstead. As there was a loft above, I called, “Is there any one here?” but no voice answered. Then I looked at my watch, and, finding that it was past nine, called again, “Is there any one here?” There being still no answer, I went out at the door, irresolute what to do.

It was beginning to rain fast. Seeing nothing save what I had seen already, I turned back into the house, and stood just within the shelter of the doorway, looking out into the night. While I was considering that some one must have been there lately and must soon be coming back, or the candle would not be burning, it came into my head to look if the wick were long. I turned round to do so, and had taken up the candle in my hand, when it was extinguished by some violent shock; and the next thing I comprehended was, that I had been caught in a strong running noose, thrown over my head from behind.

“Now,” said a suppressed voice with an oath, “I’ve got you!”

“What is this?” I cried, struggling. “Who is it? Help, help, help!”

Not only were my arms pulled close to my sides, but the pressure on my bad arm caused me exquisite pain. Sometimes, a strong man’s hand, sometimes a strong man’s breast, was set against my mouth to deaden my cries, and with a hot breath always close to me, I struggled ineffectually in the dark, while I was fastened tight to the wall. “And now,” said the suppressed voice with another oath, “call out again, and I’ll make short work of you!”

Faint and sick with the pain of my injured arm, bewildered by the surprise, and yet conscious how easily this threat could be put in execution, I desisted, and tried to ease my arm were it ever so little. But, it was bound

too tight for that. I felt as if, having been burnt before, it were now being boiled.

The sudden exclusion of the night, and the substitution of black darkness in its place, warned me that the man had closed a shutter. After groping about for a little, he found the flint and steel he wanted, and began to strike a light. I strained my sight upon the sparks that fell among the tinder, and upon which he breathed and breathed, match in hand, but I could only see his lips, and the blue point of the match; even those but fitfully. The tinder was damp,—no wonder there,—and one after another the sparks died out.

The man was in no hurry, and struck again with the flint and steel. As the sparks fell thick and bright about him, I could see his hands, and touches of his face, and could make out that he was seated and bending over the table; but nothing more. Presently I saw his blue lips again, breathing on the tinder, and then a flare of light flashed up, and showed me Orlick.

Whom I had looked for, I don't know. I had not looked for him. Seeing him, I felt that I was in a dangerous strait indeed, and I kept my eyes upon him.

He lighted the candle from the flaring match with great deliberation, and dropped the match, and trod it out. Then he put the candle away from him on the table, so that he could see me, and sat with his arms folded on the table and looked at me. I made out that I was fastened to a stout perpendicular ladder a few inches from the wall,—a fixture there,—the means of ascent to the loft above.

"Now," said he, when we had surveyed one another for some time, "I've got you."

"Unbind me. Let me go!"

"Ah!" he returned, "I'll let you go. I'll let you go to the moon, I'll let you go to the stars. All in good time."

"Why have you lured me here?"

"Don't you know?" said he, with a deadly look.

"Why have you set upon me in the dark?"

"Because I mean to do it all myself. One keeps a secret better than two. O you enemy, you enemy!"

His enjoyment of the spectacle I furnished, as he sat with his arms folded on the table, shaking his head at me and hugging himself, had a malignity in it that made me tremble. As I watched him in silence, he put his hand into

the corner at his side, and took up a gun with a brass-bound stock.

“Do you know this?” said he, making as if he would take aim at me. “Do you know where you saw it afore? Speak, wolf!”

“Yes,” I answered.

“You cost me that place. You did. Speak!”

“What else could I do?”

“You did that, and that would be enough, without more. How dared you to come betwixt me and a young woman I liked?”

“When did I?”

“When didn’t you? It was you as always give Old Orlick a bad name to her.”

“You gave it to yourself; you gained it for yourself. I could have done you no harm, if you had done yourself none.”

“You’re a liar. And you’ll take any pains, and spend any money, to drive me out of this country, will you?” said he, repeating my words to Biddy in the last interview I had with her. “Now, I’ll tell you a piece of information. It was never so well worth your while to get me out of this country as it is to-night. Ah! If it was all your money twenty times told, to the last brass farden!” As he shook his heavy hand at me, with his mouth snarling like a tiger’s, I felt that it was true.

“What are you going to do to me?”

“I’m a going,” said he, bringing his fist down upon the table with a heavy blow, and rising as the blow fell to give it greater force,—“I’m a going to have your life!”

He leaned forward staring at me, slowly unclenched his hand and drew it across his mouth as if his mouth watered for me, and sat down again.

“You was always in Old Orlick’s way since ever you was a child. You goes out of his way this present night. He’ll have no more on you. You’re dead.”

I felt that I had come to the brink of my grave. For a moment I looked wildly round my trap for any chance of escape; but there was none.

“More than that,” said he, folding his arms on the table again, “I won’t have a rag of you, I won’t have a bone of you, left on earth. I’ll put your body in the kiln,—I’d carry two such to it, on my Shoulders,—and, let people suppose what they may of you, they shall never know nothing.”

My mind, with inconceivable rapidity followed out all the consequences

of such a death. Estella's father would believe I had deserted him, would be taken, would die accusing me; even Herbert would doubt me, when he compared the letter I had left for him with the fact that I had called at Miss Havisham's gate for only a moment; Joe and Biddy would never know how sorry I had been that night, none would ever know what I had suffered, how true I had meant to be, what an agony I had passed through. The death close before me was terrible, but far more terrible than death was the dread of being misremembered after death. And so quick were my thoughts, that I saw myself despised by unborn generations,—Estella's children, and their children,—while the wretch's words were yet on his lips.

"Now, wolf," said he, "afore I kill you like any other beast,—which is wot I mean to do and wot I have tied you up for,—I'll have a good look at you and a good goad at you. O you enemy!"

It had passed through my thoughts to cry out for help again; though few could know better than I, the solitary nature of the spot, and the hopelessness of aid. But as he sat gloating over me, I was supported by a scornful detestation of him that sealed my lips. Above all things, I resolved that I would not entreat him, and that I would die making some last poor resistance to him. Softened as my thoughts of all the rest of men were in that dire extremity; humbly beseeching pardon, as I did, of Heaven; melted at heart, as I was, by the thought that I had taken no farewell, and never now could take farewell of those who were dear to me, or could explain myself to them, or ask for their compassion on my miserable errors,—still, if I could have killed him, even in dying, I would have done it.

He had been drinking, and his eyes were red and bloodshot. Around his neck was slung a tin bottle, as I had often seen his meat and drink slung about him in other days. He brought the bottle to his lips, and took a fiery drink from it; and I smelt the strong spirits that I saw flash into his face.

"Wolf!" said he, folding his arms again, "Old Orlick's a going to tell you somethink. It was you as did for your shrew sister."

Again my mind, with its former inconceivable rapidity, had exhausted the whole subject of the attack upon my sister, her illness, and her death, before his slow and hesitating speech had formed these words.

"It was you, villain," said I.

"I tell you it was your doing,—I tell you it was done through you," he retorted, catching up the gun, and making a blow with the stock at the

vacant air between us. “I come upon her from behind, as I come upon you to-night. I giv’ it her! I left her for dead, and if there had been a limekiln as nigh her as there is now nigh you, she shouldn’t have come to life again. But it warn’t Old Orlick as did it; it was you. You was favored, and he was bullied and beat. Old Orlick bullied and beat, eh? Now you pays for it. You done it; now you pays for it.”

He drank again, and became more ferocious. I saw by his tilting of the bottle that there was no great quantity left in it. I distinctly understood that he was working himself up with its contents to make an end of me. I knew that every drop it held was a drop of my life. I knew that when I was changed into a part of the vapor that had crept towards me but a little while before, like my own warning ghost, he would do as he had done in my sister’s case,—make all haste to the town, and be seen slouching about there drinking at the alehouses. My rapid mind pursued him to the town, made a picture of the street with him in it, and contrasted its lights and life with the lonely marsh and the white vapor creeping over it, into which I should have dissolved.

It was not only that I could have summed up years and years and years while he said a dozen words, but that what he did say presented pictures to me, and not mere words. In the excited and exalted state of my brain, I could not think of a place without seeing it, or of persons without seeing them. It is impossible to overstate the vividness of these images, and yet I was so intent, all the time, upon him himself,—who would not be intent on the tiger crouching to spring!—that I knew of the slightest action of his fingers.

When he had drunk this second time, he rose from the bench on which he sat, and pushed the table aside. Then, he took up the candle, and, shading it with his murderous hand so as to throw its light on me, stood before me, looking at me and enjoying the sight.

“Wolf, I’ll tell you something more. It was Old Orlick as you tumbled over on your stairs that night.”

I saw the staircase with its extinguished lamps. I saw the shadows of the heavy stair-rails, thrown by the watchman’s lantern on the wall. I saw the rooms that I was never to see again; here, a door half open; there, a door closed; all the articles of furniture around.

“And why was Old Orlick there? I’ll tell you something more, wolf. You

and her have pretty well hunted me out of this country, so far as getting a easy living in it goes, and I've took up with new companions, and new masters. Some of 'em writes my letters when I wants 'em wrote,—do you mind?—writes my letters, wolf! They writes fifty hands; they're not like sneaking you, as writes but one. I've had a firm mind and a firm will to have your life, since you was down here at your sister's burying. I han't seen a way to get you safe, and I've looked arter you to know your ins and outs. For, says Old Orlick to himself, 'Somehow or another I'll have him!' What! When I looks for you, I finds your uncle Provis, eh?"

Mill Pond Bank, and Chinks's Basin, and the Old Green Copper Ropewalk, all so clear and plain! Provis in his rooms, the signal whose use was over, pretty Clara, the good motherly woman, old Bill Barley on his back, all drifting by, as on the swift stream of my life fast running out to sea!

"You with a uncle too! Why, I know'd you at Gargery's when you was so small a wolf that I could have took your weazen betwixt this finger and thumb and chucked you away dead (as I'd thoughts o' doing, odd times, when I see you loitering amongst the pollards on a Sunday), and you hadn't found no uncles then. No, not you! But when Old Orlick come for to hear that your uncle Provis had most like wore the leg-iron wot Old Orlick had picked up, filed asunder, on these meshes ever so many year ago, and wot he kep by him till he dropped your sister with it, like a bullock, as he means to drop you—hey?—when he come for to hear that—hey?"

In his savage taunting, he flared the candle so close at me that I turned my face aside to save it from the flame.

"Ah!" he cried, laughing, after doing it again, "the burnt child dreads the fire! Old Orlick knowed you was burnt, Old Orlick knowed you was smuggling your uncle Provis away, Old Orlick's a match for you and know'd you'd come to-night! Now I'll tell you something more, wolf, and this ends it. There's them that's as good a match for your uncle Provis as Old Orlick has been for you. Let him 'ware them, when he's lost his nevvy! Let him 'ware them, when no man can't find a rag of his dear relation's clothes, nor yet a bone of his body. There's them that can't and that won't have Magwitch,—yes, I know the name!—alive in the same land with them, and that's had such sure information of him when he was alive in another land, as that he couldn't and shouldn't leave it unbeknown and put

them in danger. P’raps it’s them that writes fifty hands, and that’s not like sneaking you as writes but one. ’Ware Compeyson, Magwitch, and the gallows!”

He flared the candle at me again, smoking my face and hair, and for an instant blinding me, and turned his powerful back as he replaced the light on the table. I had thought a prayer, and had been with Joe and Biddy and Herbert, before he turned towards me again.

There was a clear space of a few feet between the table and the opposite wall. Within this space, he now slouched backwards and forwards. His great strength seemed to sit stronger upon him than ever before, as he did this with his hands hanging loose and heavy at his sides, and with his eyes scowling at me. I had no grain of hope left. Wild as my inward hurry was, and wonderful the force of the pictures that rushed by me instead of thoughts, I could yet clearly understand that, unless he had resolved that I was within a few moments of surely perishing out of all human knowledge, he would never have told me what he had told.

Of a sudden, he stopped, took the cork out of his bottle, and tossed it away. Light as it was, I heard it fall like a plummet. He swallowed slowly, tilting up the bottle by little and little, and now he looked at me no more. The last few drops of liquor he poured into the palm of his hand, and licked up. Then, with a sudden hurry of violence and swearing horribly, he threw the bottle from him, and stooped; and I saw in his hand a stone-hammer with a long heavy handle.

The resolution I had made did not desert me, for, without uttering one vain word of appeal to him, I shouted out with all my might, and struggled with all my might. It was only my head and my legs that I could move, but to that extent I struggled with all the force, until then unknown, that was within me. In the same instant I heard responsive shouts, saw figures and a gleam of light dash in at the door, heard voices and tumult, and saw Orlick emerge from a struggle of men, as if it were tumbling water, clear the table at a leap, and fly out into the night.

After a blank, I found that I was lying unbound, on the floor, in the same place, with my head on some one’s knee. My eyes were fixed on the ladder against the wall, when I came to myself,—had opened on it before my mind saw it,—and thus as I recovered consciousness, I knew that I was in the place where I had lost it.

Too indifferent at first, even to look round and ascertain who supported me, I was lying looking at the ladder, when there came between me and it a face. The face of Trabb's boy!

"I think he's all right!" said Trabb's boy, in a sober voice; "but ain't he just pale though!"

At these words, the face of him who supported me looked over into mine, and I saw my supporter to be—

"Herbert! Great Heaven!"

"Softly," said Herbert. "Gently, Handel. Don't be too eager."

"And our old comrade, Startop!" I cried, as he too bent over me.

"Remember what he is going to assist us in," said Herbert, "and be calm."

The allusion made me spring up; though I dropped again from the pain in my arm. "The time has not gone by, Herbert, has it? What night is to-night? How long have I been here?" For, I had a strange and strong misgiving that I had been lying there a long time—a day and a night,—two days and nights,—more.

"The time has not gone by. It is still Monday night."

"Thank God!"

"And you have all to-morrow, Tuesday, to rest in," said Herbert. "But you can't help groaning, my dear Handel. What hurt have you got? Can you stand?"

"Yes, yes," said I, "I can walk. I have no hurt but in this throbbing arm."

They laid it bare, and did what they could. It was violently swollen and inflamed, and I could scarcely endure to have it touched. But, they tore up their handkerchiefs to make fresh bandages, and carefully replaced it in the sling, until we could get to the town and obtain some cooling lotion to put upon it. In a little while we had shut the door of the dark and empty sluice-house, and were passing through the quarry on our way back. Trabb's boy —Trabb's overgrown young man now—went before us with a lantern, which was the light I had seen come in at the door. But, the moon was a good two hours higher than when I had last seen the sky, and the night, though rainy, was much lighter. The white vapor of the kiln was passing from us as we went by, and as I had thought a prayer before, I thought a thanksgiving now.

Entreating Herbert to tell me how he had come to my rescue,—which at

first he had flatly refused to do, but had insisted on my remaining quiet,—I learnt that I had in my hurry dropped the letter, open, in our chambers, where he, coming home to bring with him Startop whom he had met in the street on his way to me, found it, very soon after I was gone. Its tone made him uneasy, and the more so because of the inconsistency between it and the hasty letter I had left for him. His uneasiness increasing instead of subsiding, after a quarter of an hour's consideration, he set off for the coach-office with Startop, who volunteered his company, to make inquiry when the next coach went down. Finding that the afternoon coach was gone, and finding that his uneasiness grew into positive alarm, as obstacles came in his way, he resolved to follow in a post-chaise. So he and Startop arrived at the Blue Boar, fully expecting there to find me, or tidings of me; but, finding neither, went on to Miss Havisham's, where they lost me. Hereupon they went back to the hotel (doubtless at about the time when I was hearing the popular local version of my own story) to refresh themselves and to get some one to guide them out upon the marshes. Among the loungers under the Boar's archway happened to be Trabb's Boy, —true to his ancient habit of happening to be everywhere where he had no business,—and Trabb's boy had seen me passing from Miss Havisham's in the direction of my dining-place. Thus Trabb's boy became their guide, and with him they went out to the sluice-house, though by the town way to the marshes, which I had avoided. Now, as they went along, Herbert reflected, that I might, after all, have been brought there on some genuine and serviceable errand tending to Provis's safety, and, bethinking himself that in that case interruption must be mischievous, left his guide and Startop on the edge of the quarry, and went on by himself, and stole round the house two or three times, endeavouring to ascertain whether all was right within. As he could hear nothing but indistinct sounds of one deep rough voice (this was while my mind was so busy), he even at last began to doubt whether I was there, when suddenly I cried out loudly, and he answered the cries, and rushed in, closely followed by the other two.

When I told Herbert what had passed within the house, he was for our immediately going before a magistrate in the town, late at night as it was, and getting out a warrant. But, I had already considered that such a course, by detaining us there, or binding us to come back, might be fatal to Provis. There was no gainsaying this difficulty, and we relinquished all thoughts of

pursuing Orlick at that time. For the present, under the circumstances, we deemed it prudent to make rather light of the matter to Trabb's boy; who, I am convinced, would have been much affected by disappointment, if he had known that his intervention saved me from the limekiln. Not that Trabb's boy was of a malignant nature, but that he had too much spare vivacity, and that it was in his constitution to want variety and excitement at anybody's expense. When we parted, I presented him with two guineas (which seemed to meet his views), and told him that I was sorry ever to have had an ill opinion of him (which made no impression on him at all).

Wednesday being so close upon us, we determined to go back to London that night, three in the post-chaise; the rather, as we should then be clear away before the night's adventure began to be talked of. Herbert got a large bottle of stuff for my arm; and by dint of having this stuff dropped over it all the night through, I was just able to bear its pain on the journey. It was daylight when we reached the Temple, and I went at once to bed, and lay in bed all day.

My terror, as I lay there, of falling ill, and being unfitted for to-morrow, was so besetting, that I wonder it did not disable me of itself. It would have done so, pretty surely, in conjunction with the mental wear and tear I had suffered, but for the unnatural strain upon me that to-morrow was. So anxiously looked forward to, charged with such consequences, its results so impenetrably hidden, though so near.

No precaution could have been more obvious than our refraining from communication with him that day; yet this again increased my restlessness. I started at every footstep and every sound, believing that he was discovered and taken, and this was the messenger to tell me so. I persuaded myself that I knew he was taken; that there was something more upon my mind than a fear or a presentiment; that the fact had occurred, and I had a mysterious knowledge of it. As the days wore on, and no ill news came, as the day closed in and darkness fell, my overshadowing dread of being disabled by illness before to-morrow morning altogether mastered me. My burning arm throbbed, and my burning head throbbed, and I fancied I was beginning to wander. I counted up to high numbers, to make sure of myself, and repeated passages that I knew in prose and verse. It happened sometimes that in the mere escape of a fatigued mind, I dozed for some moments or forgot; then I would say to myself with a start, "Now it has come, and I am turning

delirious!”

They kept me very quiet all day, and kept my arm constantly dressed, and gave me cooling drinks. Whenever I fell asleep, I awoke with the notion I had had in the sluice-house, that a long time had elapsed and the opportunity to save him was gone. About midnight I got out of bed and went to Herbert, with the conviction that I had been asleep for four-and-twenty hours, and that Wednesday was past. It was the last self-exhausting effort of my fretfulness, for after that I slept soundly.

Wednesday morning was dawning when I looked out of window. The winking lights upon the bridges were already pale, the coming sun was like a marsh of fire on the horizon. The river, still dark and mysterious, was spanned by bridges that were turning coldly gray, with here and there at top a warm touch from the burning in the sky. As I looked along the clustered roofs, with church-towers and spires shooting into the unusually clear air, the sun rose up, and a veil seemed to be drawn from the river, and millions of sparkles burst out upon its waters. From me too, a veil seemed to be drawn, and I felt strong and well.

Herbert lay asleep in his bed, and our old fellow-student lay asleep on the sofa. I could not dress myself without help; but I made up the fire, which was still burning, and got some coffee ready for them. In good time they too started up strong and well, and we admitted the sharp morning air at the windows, and looked at the tide that was still flowing towards us.

“When it turns at nine o’clock,” said Herbert, cheerfully, “look out for us, and stand ready, you over there at Mill Pond Bank!”

Chapter LIV

IT WAS ONE OF those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade. We had our pea-coats with us, and I took a bag. Of all my worldly possessions I took no more than the few necessaries that filled the bag. Where I might go, what I might do, or when I might return, were questions utterly unknown to me; nor did I vex my mind with them, for it was wholly set on Provis's safety. I only wondered for the passing moment, as I stopped at the door and looked back, under what altered circumstances I should next see those rooms, if ever.

We loitered down to the Temple stairs, and stood loitering there, as if we were not quite decided to go upon the water at all. Of course, I had taken care that the boat should be ready and everything in order. After a little show of indecision, which there were none to see but the two or three amphibious creatures belonging to our Temple stairs, we went on board and cast off; Herbert in the bow, I steering. It was then about high-water,—half-past eight.

Our plan was this. The tide, beginning to run down at nine, and being with us until three, we intended still to creep on after it had turned, and row against it until dark. We should then be well in those long reaches below Gravesend, between Kent and Essex, where the river is broad and solitary, where the water-side inhabitants are very few, and where lone public-houses are scattered here and there, of which we could choose one for a resting-place. There, we meant to lie by all night. The steamer for Hamburg and the steamer for Rotterdam would start from London at about nine on Thursday morning. We should know at what time to expect them, according to where we were, and would hail the first; so that, if by any accident we were not taken abroad, we should have another chance. We knew the

distinguishing marks of each vessel.

The relief of being at last engaged in the execution of the purpose was so great to me that I felt it difficult to realize the condition in which I had been a few hours before. The crisp air, the sunlight, the movement on the river, and the moving river itself,—the road that ran with us, seeming to sympathize with us, animate us, and encourage us on,—freshened me with new hope. I felt mortified to be of so little use in the boat; but, there were few better oarsmen than my two friends, and they rowed with a steady stroke that was to last all day.

At that time, the steam-traffic on the Thames was far below its present extent, and watermen's boats were far more numerous. Of barges, sailing colliers, and coasting-traders, there were perhaps, as many as now; but of steam-ships, great and small, not a tithe or a twentieth part so many. Early as it was, there were plenty of scullers going here and there that morning, and plenty of barges dropping down with the tide; the navigation of the river between bridges, in an open boat, was a much easier and commoner matter in those days than it is in these; and we went ahead among many skiffs and wherries briskly.

Old London Bridge was soon passed, and old Billingsgate Market with its oyster-boats and Dutchmen, and the White Tower and Traitor's Gate, and we were in among the tiers of shipping. Here were the Leith, Aberdeen, and Glasgow steamers, loading and unloading goods, and looking immensely high out of the water as we passed alongside; here, were colliers by the score and score, with the coal-whippers plunging off stages on deck, as counterweights to measures of coal swinging up, which were then rattled over the side into barges; here, at her moorings was to-morrow's steamer for Rotterdam, of which we took good notice; and here to-morrow's for Hamburg, under whose bowsprit we crossed. And now I, sitting in the stern, could see, with a faster beating heart, Mill Pond Bank and Mill Pond stairs.

"Is he there?" said Herbert.

"Not yet."

"Right! He was not to come down till he saw us. Can you see his signal?"

"Not well from here; but I think I see it.— Now I see him! Pull both. Easy, Herbert. Oars!"

We touched the stairs lightly for a single moment, and he was on board,

and we were off again. He had a boat-cloak with him, and a black canvas bag; and he looked as like a river-pilot as my heart could have wished.

"Dear boy!" he said, putting his arm on my shoulder, as he took his seat. "Faithful dear boy, well done. Thankye, thankye!"

Again among the tiers of shipping, in and out, avoiding rusty chain-cables frayed hempen hawsers and bobbing buoys, sinking for the moment floating broken baskets, scattering floating chips of wood and shaving, cleaving floating scum of coal, in and out, under the figure-head of the John of Sunderland making a speech to the winds (as is done by many Johns), and the Betsy of Yarmouth with a firm formality of bosom and her knobby eyes starting two inches out of her head; in and out, hammers going in ship-builders' yards, saws going at timber, clashing engines going at things unknown, pumps going in leaky ships, capstans going, ships going out to sea, and unintelligible sea-creatures roaring curses over the bulwarks at respondent lightermen, in and out,—out at last upon the clearer river, where the ships' boys might take their fenders in, no longer fishing in troubled waters with them over the side, and where the festooned sails might fly out to the wind.

At the stairs where we had taken him abroad, and ever since, I had looked warily for any token of our being suspected. I had seen none. We certainly had not been, and at that time as certainly we were not either attended or followed by any boat. If we had been waited on by any boat, I should have run in to shore, and have obliged her to go on, or to make her purpose evident. But we held our own without any appearance of molestation.

He had his boat-cloak on him, and looked, as I have said, a natural part of the scene. It was remarkable (but perhaps the wretched life he had led accounted for it) that he was the least anxious of any of us. He was not indifferent, for he told me that he hoped to live to see his gentleman one of the best of gentlemen in a foreign country; he was not disposed to be passive or resigned, as I understood it; but he had no notion of meeting danger half way. When it came upon him, he confronted it, but it must come before he troubled himself.

"If you knowed, dear boy," he said to me, "what it is to sit here alonger my dear boy and have my smoke, arter having been day by day betwixt four walls, you'd envy me. But you don't know what it is."

“I think I know the delights of freedom,” I answered.

“Ah,” said he, shaking his head gravely. “But you don’t know it equal to me. You must have been under lock and key, dear boy, to know it equal to me,—but I ain’t a going to be low.”

It occurred to me as inconsistent, that, for any mastering idea, he should have endangered his freedom, and even his life. But I reflected that perhaps freedom without danger was too much apart from all the habit of his existence to be to him what it would be to another man. I was not far out, since he said, after smoking a little:—

“You see, dear boy, when I was over yonder, t’other side the world, I was always a looking to this side; and it come flat to be there, for all I was a growing rich. Everybody knowed Magwitch, and Magwitch could come, and Magwitch could go, and nobody’s head would be troubled about him. They ain’t so easy concerning me here, dear boy,—wouldn’t be, leastwise, if they knowed where I was.”

“If all goes well,” said I, “you will be perfectly free and safe again within a few hours.”

“Well,” he returned, drawing a long breath, “I hope so.”

“And think so?”

He dipped his hand in the water over the boat’s gunwale, and said, smiling with that softened air upon him which was not new to me:—

“Ay, I s’pose I think so, dear boy. We’d be puzzled to be more quiet and easy-going than we are at present. But—it’s a flowing so soft and pleasant through the water, p’raps, as makes me think it— I was a thinking through my smoke just then, that we can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours than we can see to the bottom of this river what I catches hold of. Nor yet we can’t no more hold their tide than I can hold this. And it’s run through my fingers and gone, you see!” holding up his dripping hand.

“But for your face I should think you were a little despondent,” said I.

“Not a bit on it, dear boy! It comes of flowing on so quiet, and of that there rippling at the boat’s head making a sort of a Sunday tune. Maybe I’m a growing a trifle old besides.”

He put his pipe back in his mouth with an undisturbed expression of face, and sat as composed and contented as if we were already out of England. Yet he was as submissive to a word of advice as if he had been in constant terror; for, when we ran ashore to get some bottles of beer into the

boat, and he was stepping out, I hinted that I thought he would be safest where he was, and he said. “Do you, dear boy?” and quietly sat down again.

The air felt cold upon the river, but it was a bright day, and the sunshine was very cheering. The tide ran strong, I took care to lose none of it, and our steady stroke carried us on thoroughly well. By imperceptible degrees, as the tide ran out, we lost more and more of the nearer woods and hills, and dropped lower and lower between the muddy banks, but the tide was yet with us when we were off Gravesend. As our charge was wrapped in his cloak, I purposely passed within a boat or two’s length of the floating Custom House, and so out to catch the stream, alongside of two emigrant ships, and under the bows of a large transport with troops on the forecastle looking down at us. And soon the tide began to slacken, and the craft lying at anchor to swing, and presently they had all swung round, and the ships that were taking advantage of the new tide to get up to the Pool began to crowd upon us in a fleet, and we kept under the shore, as much out of the strength of the tide now as we could, standing carefully off from low shallows and mudbanks.

Our oarsmen were so fresh, by dint of having occasionally let her drive with the tide for a minute or two, that a quarter of an hour’s rest proved full as much as they wanted. We got ashore among some slippery stones while we ate and drank what we had with us, and looked about. It was like my own marsh country, flat and monotonous, and with a dim horizon; while the winding river turned and turned, and the great floating buoys upon it turned and turned, and everything else seemed stranded and still. For now the last of the fleet of ships was round the last low point we had headed; and the last green barge, straw-laden, with a brown sail, had followed; and some ballast-lighters, shaped like a child’s first rude imitation of a boat, lay low in the mud; and a little squat shoal-lighthouse on open piles stood crippled in the mud on stilts and crutches; and slimy stakes stuck out of the mud, and slimy stones stuck out of the mud, and red landmarks and tidemarks stuck out of the mud, and an old landing-stage and an old roofless building slipped into the mud, and all about us was stagnation and mud.

We pushed off again, and made what way we could. It was much harder work now, but Herbert and Startop persevered, and rowed and rowed and rowed until the sun went down. By that time the river had lifted us a little, so that we could see above the bank. There was the red sun, on the low

level of the shore, in a purple haze, fast deepening into black; and there was the solitary flat marsh; and far away there were the rising grounds, between which and us there seemed to be no life, save here and there in the foreground a melancholy gull.

As the night was fast falling, and as the moon, being past the full, would not rise early, we held a little council; a short one, for clearly our course was to lie by at the first lonely tavern we could find. So, they plied their oars once more, and I looked out for anything like a house. Thus we held on, speaking little, for four or five dull miles. It was very cold, and, a collier coming by us, with her galley-fire smoking and flaring, looked like a comfortable home. The night was as dark by this time as it would be until morning; and what light we had, seemed to come more from the river than the sky, as the oars in their dipping struck at a few reflected stars.

At this dismal time we were evidently all possessed by the idea that we were followed. As the tide made, it flapped heavily at irregular intervals against the shore; and whenever such a sound came, one or other of us was sure to start, and look in that direction. Here and there, the set of the current had worn down the bank into a little creek, and we were all suspicious of such places, and eyed them nervously. Sometimes, “What was that ripple?” one of us would say in a low voice. Or another, “Is that a boat yonder?” And afterwards we would fall into a dead silence, and I would sit impatiently thinking with what an unusual amount of noise the oars worked in the thowels.

At length we descried a light and a roof, and presently afterwards ran alongside a little causeway made of stones that had been picked up hard by. Leaving the rest in the boat, I stepped ashore, and found the light to be in a window of a public-house. It was a dirty place enough, and I dare say not unknown to smuggling adventurers; but there was a good fire in the kitchen, and there were eggs and bacon to eat, and various liquors to drink. Also, there were two double-bedded rooms,—“such as they were,” the landlord said. No other company was in the house than the landlord, his wife, and a grizzled male creature, the “Jack” of the little causeway, who was as slimy and smeary as if he had been low-water mark too.

With this assistant, I went down to the boat again, and we all came ashore, and brought out the oars, and rudder and boat-hook, and all else, and hauled her up for the night. We made a very good meal by the kitchen

fire, and then apportioned the bedrooms: Herbert and Startop were to occupy one; I and our charge the other. We found the air as carefully excluded from both, as if air were fatal to life; and there were more dirty clothes and bandboxes under the beds than I should have thought the family possessed. But we considered ourselves well off, notwithstanding, for a more solitary place we could not have found.

While we were comforting ourselves by the fire after our meal, the Jack —who was sitting in a corner, and who had a bloated pair of shoes on, which he had exhibited while we were eating our eggs and bacon, as interesting relics that he had taken a few days ago from the feet of a drowned seaman washed ashore—asked me if we had seen a four-oared galley going up with the tide? When I told him No, he said she must have gone down then, and yet she "took up too," when she left there.

"They must ha' thought better on't for some reason or another," said the Jack, "and gone down."

"A four-oared galley, did you say?" said I.

"A four," said the Jack, "and two sitters."

"Did they come ashore here?"

"They put in with a stone two-gallon jar for some beer. I'd ha' been glad to pison the beer myself," said the Jack, "or put some rattling physic in it."

"Why?"

"I know why," said the Jack. He spoke in a slushy voice, as if much mud had washed into his throat.

"He thinks," said the landlord, a weakly meditative man with a pale eye, who seemed to rely greatly on his Jack,—"he thinks they was, what they wasn't."

"I knows what I thinks," observed the Jack.

"You thinks Custum 'Us, Jack?" said the landlord.

"I do," said the Jack.

"Then you're wrong, Jack."

"*Am I*!"

In the infinite meaning of his reply and his boundless confidence in his views, the Jack took one of his bloated shoes off, looked into it, knocked a few stones out of it on the kitchen floor, and put it on again. He did this with the air of a Jack who was so right that he could afford to do anything.

"Why, what do you make out that they done with their buttons then,

Jack?” asked the landlord, vacillating weakly.

“Done with their buttons?” returned the Jack. “Chucked ’em overboard. Swallered ’em. Sowed ’em, to come up small salad. Done with their buttons!”

“Don’t be cheeky, Jack,” remonstrated the landlord, in a melancholy and pathetic way.

“A Custum ’Us officer knows what to do with his Buttons,” said the Jack, repeating the obnoxious word with the greatest contempt, “when they comes betwixt him and his own light. A four and two sitters don’t go hanging and hovering, up with one tide and down with another, and both with and against another, without there being Custum ’Us at the bottom of it.” Saying which he went out in disdain; and the landlord, having no one to reply upon, found it impracticable to pursue the subject.

This dialogue made us all uneasy, and me very uneasy. The dismal wind was muttering round the house, the tide was flapping at the shore, and I had a feeling that we were caged and threatened. A four-oared galley hovering about in so unusual a way as to attract this notice was an ugly circumstance that I could not get rid of. When I had induced Provis to go up to bed, I went outside with my two companions (Startop by this time knew the state of the case), and held another council. Whether we should remain at the house until near the steamer’s time, which would be about one in the afternoon, or whether we should put off early in the morning, was the question we discussed. On the whole we deemed it the better course to lie where we were, until within an hour or so of the steamer’s time, and then to get out in her track, and drift easily with the tide. Having settled to do this, we returned into the house and went to bed.

I lay down with the greater part of my clothes on, and slept well for a few hours. When I awoke, the wind had risen, and the sign of the house (the Ship) was creaking and banging about, with noises that startled me. Rising softly, for my charge lay fast asleep, I looked out of the window. It commanded the causeway where we had hauled up our boat, and, as my eyes adapted themselves to the light of the clouded moon, I saw two men looking into her. They passed by under the window, looking at nothing else, and they did not go down to the landing-place which I could discern to be empty, but struck across the marsh in the direction of the Nore.

My first impulse was to call up Herbert, and show him the two men

going away. But reflecting, before I got into his room, which was at the back of the house and adjoined mine, that he and Startop had had a harder day than I, and were fatigued, I forbore. Going back to my window, I could see the two men moving over the marsh. In that light, however, I soon lost them, and, feeling very cold, lay down to think of the matter, and fell asleep again.

We were up early. As we walked to and fro, all four together, before breakfast, I deemed it right to recount what I had seen. Again our charge was the least anxious of the party. It was very likely that the men belonged to the Custom House, he said quietly, and that they had no thought of us. I tried to persuade myself that it was so,—as, indeed, it might easily be. However, I proposed that he and I should walk away together to a distant point we could see, and that the boat should take us aboard there, or as near there as might prove feasible, at about noon. This being considered a good precaution, soon after breakfast he and I set forth, without saying anything at the tavern.

He smoked his pipe as we went along, and sometimes stopped to clap me on the shoulder. One would have supposed that it was I who was in danger, not he, and that he was reassuring me. We spoke very little. As we approached the point, I begged him to remain in a sheltered place, while I went on to reconnoitre; for it was towards it that the men had passed in the night. He complied, and I went on alone. There was no boat off the point, nor any boat drawn up anywhere near it, nor were there any signs of the men having embarked there. But, to be sure, the tide was high, and there might have been some footprints under water.

When he looked out from his shelter in the distance, and saw that I waved my hat to him to come up, he rejoined me, and there we waited; sometimes lying on the bank, wrapped in our coats, and sometimes moving about to warm ourselves, until we saw our boat coming round. We got aboard easily, and rowed out into the track of the steamer. By that time it wanted but ten minutes of one o’clock, and we began to look out for her smoke.

But, it was half-past one before we saw her smoke, and soon afterwards we saw behind it the smoke of another steamer. As they were coming on at full speed, we got the two bags ready, and took that opportunity of saying good by to Herbert and Startop. We had all shaken hands cordially, and

neither Herbert's eyes nor mine were quite dry, when I saw a four-oared galley shoot out from under the bank but a little way ahead of us, and row out into the same track.

A stretch of shore had been as yet between us and the steamer's smoke, by reason of the bend and wind of the river; but now she was visible, coming head on. I called to Herbert and Startop to keep before the tide, that she might see us lying by for her, and I adjured Provis to sit quite still, wrapped in his cloak. He answered cheerily, "Trust to me, dear boy," and sat like a statue. Meantime the galley, which was very skilfully handled, had crossed us, let us come up with her, and fallen alongside. Leaving just room enough for the play of the oars, she kept alongside, drifting when we drifted, and pulling a stroke or two when we pulled. Of the two sitters one held the rudder-lines, and looked at us attentively,—as did all the rowers; the other sitter was wrapped up, much as Provis was, and seemed to shrink, and whisper some instruction to the steerer as he looked at us. Not a word was spoken in either boat.

Startop could make out, after a few minutes, which steamer was first, and gave me the word "Hamburg," in a low voice, as we sat face to face. She was nearing us very fast, and the beating of her peddles grew louder and louder. I felt as if her shadow were absolutely upon us, when the galley hailed us. I answered.

"You have a returned Transport there," said the man who held the lines. "That's the man, wrapped in the cloak. His name is Abel Magwitch, otherwise Provis. I apprehend that man, and call upon him to surrender, and you to assist."

At the same moment, without giving any audible direction to his crew, he ran the galley abroad of us. They had pulled one sudden stroke ahead, had got their oars in, had run athwart us, and were holding on to our gunwale, before we knew what they were doing. This caused great confusion on board the steamer, and I heard them calling to us, and heard the order given to stop the paddles, and heard them stop, but felt her driving down upon us irresistibly. In the same moment, I saw the steersman of the galley lay his hand on his prisoner's shoulder, and saw that both boats were swinging round with the force of the tide, and saw that all hands on board the steamer were running forward quite frantically. Still, in the same moment, I saw the prisoner start up, lean across his captor, and pull the

cloak from the neck of the shrinking sitter in the galley. Still in the same moment, I saw that the face disclosed, was the face of the other convict of long ago. Still, in the same moment, I saw the face tilt backward with a white terror on it that I shall never forget, and heard a great cry on board the steamer, and a loud splash in the water, and felt the boat sink from under me.

It was but for an instant that I seemed to struggle with a thousand mill-weirs and a thousand flashes of light; that instant past, I was taken on board the galley. Herbert was there, and Startop was there; but our boat was gone, and the two convicts were gone.

What with the cries aboard the steamer, and the furious blowing off of her steam, and her driving on, and our driving on, I could not at first distinguish sky from water or shore from shore; but the crew of the galley righted her with great speed, and, pulling certain swift strong strokes ahead, lay upon their oars, every man looking silently and eagerly at the water astern. Presently a dark object was seen in it, bearing towards us on the tide. No man spoke, but the steersman held up his hand, and all softly backed water, and kept the boat straight and true before it. As it came nearer, I saw it to be Magwitch, swimming, but not swimming freely. He was taken on board, and instantly manacled at the wrists and ankles.

The galley was kept steady, and the silent, eager look-out at the water was resumed. But, the Rotterdam steamer now came up, and apparently not understanding what had happened, came on at speed. By the time she had been hailed and stopped, both steamers were drifting away from us, and we were rising and falling in a troubled wake of water. The look-out was kept, long after all was still again and the two steamers were gone; but everybody knew that it was hopeless now.

At length we gave it up, and pulled under the shore towards the tavern we had lately left, where we were received with no little surprise. Here I was able to get some comforts for Magwitch,—Provis no longer,—who had received some very severe injury in the Chest, and a deep cut in the head.

He told me that he believed himself to have gone under the keel of the steamer, and to have been struck on the head in rising. The injury to his chest (which rendered his breathing extremely painful) he thought he had received against the side of the galley. He added that he did not pretend to say what he might or might not have done to Compeyson, but that, in the

moment of his laying his hand on his cloak to identify him, that villain had staggered up and staggered back, and they had both gone overboard together, when the sudden wrenching of him (Magwitch) out of our boat, and the endeavor of his captor to keep him in it, had capsized us. He told me in a whisper that they had gone down fiercely locked in each other's arms, and that there had been a struggle under water, and that he had disengaged himself, struck out, and swum away.

I never had any reason to doubt the exact truth of what he thus told me. The officer who steered the galley gave the same account of their going overboard.

When I asked this officer's permission to change the prisoner's wet clothes by purchasing any spare garments I could get at the public-house, he gave it readily: merely observing that he must take charge of everything his prisoner had about him. So the pocket-book which had once been in my hands passed into the officer's. He further gave me leave to accompany the prisoner to London; but declined to accord that grace to my two friends.

The Jack at the Ship was instructed where the drowned man had gone down, and undertook to search for the body in the places where it was likeliest to come ashore. His interest in its recovery seemed to me to be much heightened when he heard that it had stockings on. Probably, it took about a dozen drowned men to fit him out completely; and that may have been the reason why the different articles of his dress were in various stages of decay.

We remained at the public-house until the tide turned, and then Magwitch was carried down to the galley and put on board. Herbert and Startop were to get to London by land, as soon as they could. We had a doleful parting, and when I took my place by Magwitch's side, I felt that that was my place henceforth while he lived.

For now, my repugnance to him had all melted away; and in the hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe.

His breathing became more difficult and painful as the night drew on, and often he could not repress a groan. I tried to rest him on the arm I could use, in any easy position; but it was dreadful to think that I could not be

sorry at heart for his being badly hurt, since it was unquestionably best that he should die. That there were, still living, people enough who were able and willing to identify him, I could not doubt. That he would be leniently treated, I could not hope. He who had been presented in the worst light at his trial, who had since broken prison and had been tried again, who had returned from transportation under a life sentence, and who had occasioned the death of the man who was the cause of his arrest.

As we returned towards the setting sun we had yesterday left behind us, and as the stream of our hopes seemed all running back, I told him how grieved I was to think that he had come home for my sake.

“Dear boy,” he answered, “I’m quite content to take my chance. I’ve seen my boy, and he can be a gentleman without me.”

No. I had thought about that, while we had been there side by side. No. Apart from any inclinations of my own, I understood Wemmick’s hint now. I foresaw that, being convicted, his possessions would be forfeited to the Crown.

“Lookee here, dear boy,” said he. “It’s best as a gentleman should not be knowed to belong to me now. Only come to see me as if you come by chance alonger Wemmick. Sit where I can see you when I am swore to, for the last o’ many times, and I don’t ask no more.”

“I will never stir from your side,” said I, “when I am suffered to be near you. Please God, I will be as true to you as you have been to me!”

I felt his hand tremble as it held mine, and he turned his face away as he lay in the bottom of the boat, and I heard that old sound in his throat,—softened now, like all the rest of him. It was a good thing that he had touched this point, for it put into my mind what I might not otherwise have thought of until too late,—that he need never know how his hopes of enriching me had perished.

Chapter LV

HE WAS TAKEN TO the Police Court next day, and would have been immediately committed for trial, but that it was necessary to send down for an old officer of the prison-ship from which he had once escaped, to speak to his identity. Nobody doubted it; but Compeyson, who had meant to depose to it, was tumbling on the tides, dead, and it happened that there was not at that time any prison officer in London who could give the required evidence. I had gone direct to Mr. Jaggers at his private house, on my arrival over night, to retain his assistance, and Mr. Jaggers on the prisoner's behalf would admit nothing. It was the sole resource; for he told me that the case must be over in five minutes when the witness was there, and that no power on earth could prevent its going against us.

I imparted to Mr. Jaggers my design of keeping him in ignorance of the fate of his wealth. Mr. Jaggers was querulous and angry with me for having "let it slip through my fingers," and said we must memorialize by and by, and try at all events for some of it. But he did not conceal from me that, although there might be many cases in which the forfeiture would not be exacted, there were no circumstances in this case to make it one of them. I understood that very well. I was not related to the outlaw, or connected with him by any recognizable tie; he had put his hand to no writing or settlement in my favor before his apprehension, and to do so now would be idle. I had no claim, and I finally resolved, and ever afterwards abided by the resolution, that my heart should never be sickened with the hopeless task of attempting to establish one.

There appeared to be reason for supposing that the drowned informer had hoped for a reward out of this forfeiture, and had obtained some accurate knowledge of Magwitch's affairs. When his body was found, many miles from the scene of his death, and so horribly disfigured that he was

only recognizable by the contents of his pockets, notes were still legible, folded in a case he carried. Among these were the name of a banking-house in New South Wales, where a sum of money was, and the designation of certain lands of considerable value. Both these heads of information were in a list that Magwitch, while in prison, gave to Mr. Jaggers, of the possessions he supposed I should inherit. His ignorance, poor fellow, at last served him; he never mistrusted but that my inheritance was quite safe, with Mr. Jaggers's aid.

After three days' delay, during which the crown prosecution stood over for the production of the witness from the prison-ship, the witness came, and completed the easy case. He was committed to take his trial at the next Sessions, which would come on in a month.

It was at this dark time of my life that Herbert returned home one evening, a good deal cast down, and said,—

"My dear Handel, I fear I shall soon have to leave you."

His partner having prepared me for that, I was less surprised than he thought.

"We shall lose a fine opportunity if I put off going to Cairo, and I am very much afraid I must go, Handel, when you most need me."

"Herbert, I shall always need you, because I shall always love you; but my need is no greater now than at another time."

"You will be so lonely."

"I have not leisure to think of that," said I. "You know that I am always with him to the full extent of the time allowed, and that I should be with him all day long, if I could. And when I come away from him, you know that my thoughts are with him."

The dreadful condition to which he was brought, was so appalling to both of us, that we could not refer to it in plainer words.

"My dear fellow," said Herbert, "let the near prospect of our separation —for, it is very near—be my justification for troubling you about yourself. Have you thought of your future?"

"No, for I have been afraid to think of any future."

"But yours cannot be dismissed; indeed, my dear dear Handel, it must not be dismissed. I wish you would enter on it now, as far as a few friendly words go, with me."

"I will," said I.

“In this branch house of ours, Handel, we must have a—”

I saw that his delicacy was avoiding the right word, so I said, “A clerk.”

“A clerk. And I hope it is not at all unlikely that he may expand (as a clerk of your acquaintance has expanded) into a partner. Now, Handel,—in short, my dear boy, will you come to me?”

There was something charmingly cordial and engaging in the manner in which after saying “Now, Handel,” as if it were the grave beginning of a portentous business exordium, he had suddenly given up that tone, stretched out his honest hand, and spoken like a schoolboy.

“Clara and I have talked about it again and again,” Herbert pursued, “and the dear little thing begged me only this evening, with tears in her eyes, to say to you that, if you will live with us when we come together, she will do her best to make you happy, and to convince her husband’s friend that he is her friend too. We should get on so well, Handel!”

I thanked her heartily, and I thanked him heartily, but said I could not yet make sure of joining him as he so kindly offered. Firstly, my mind was too preoccupied to be able to take in the subject clearly. Secondly,— Yes! Secondly, there was a vague something lingering in my thoughts that will come out very near the end of this slight narrative.

“But if you thought, Herbert, that you could, without doing any injury to your business, leave the question open for a little while—”

“For any while,” cried Herbert. “Six months, a year!”

“Not so long as that,” said I. “Two or three months at most.”

Herbert was highly delighted when we shook hands on this arrangement, and said he could now take courage to tell me that he believed he must go away at the end of the week.

“And Clara?” said I.

“The dear little thing,” returned Herbert, “holds dutifully to her father as long as he lasts; but he won’t last long. Mrs. Whimple confides to me that he is certainly going.”

“Not to say an unfeeling thing,” said I, “he cannot do better than go.”

“I am afraid that must be admitted,” said Herbert; “and then I shall come back for the dear little thing, and the dear little thing and I will walk quietly into the nearest church. Remember! The blessed darling comes of no family, my dear Handel, and never looked into the red book, and hasn’t a notion about her grandpapa. What a fortune for the son of my mother!”

On the Saturday in that same week, I took my leave of Herbert,—full of bright hope, but sad and sorry to leave me,—as he sat on one of the seaport mail coaches. I went into a coffee-house to write a little note to Clara, telling her he had gone off, sending his love to her over and over again, and then went to my lonely home,—if it deserved the name; for it was now no home to me, and I had no home anywhere.

On the stairs I encountered Wemmick, who was coming down, after an unsuccessful application of his knuckles to my door. I had not seen him alone since the disastrous issue of the attempted flight; and he had come, in his private and personal capacity, to say a few words of explanation in reference to that failure.

“The late Compeyson,” said Wemmick, “had by little and little got at the bottom of half of the regular business now transacted; and it was from the talk of some of his people in trouble (some of his people being always in trouble) that I heard what I did. I kept my ears open, seeming to have them shut, until I heard that he was absent, and I thought that would be the best time for making the attempt. I can only suppose now, that it was a part of his policy, as a very clever man, habitually to deceive his own instruments. You don’t blame me, I hope, Mr. Pip? I am sure I tried to serve you, with all my heart.”

“I am as sure of that, Wemmick, as you can be, and I thank you most earnestly for all your interest and friendship.”

“Thank you, thank you very much. It’s a bad job,” said Wemmick, scratching his head, “and I assure you I haven’t been so cut up for a long time. What I look at is the sacrifice of so much portable property. Dear me!”

“What I think of, Wemmick, is the poor owner of the property.”

“Yes, to be sure,” said Wemmick. “Of course, there can be no objection to your being sorry for him, and I’d put down a five-pound note myself to get him out of it. But what I look at is this. The late Compeyson having been beforehand with him in intelligence of his return, and being so determined to bring him to book, I do not think he could have been saved. Whereas, the portable property certainly could have been saved. That’s the difference between the property and the owner, don’t you see?”

I invited Wemmick to come up stairs, and refresh himself with a glass of grog before walking to Walworth. He accepted the invitation. While he was drinking his moderate allowance, he said, with nothing to lead up to it, and

after having appeared rather fidgety,—

“What do you think of my meaning to take a holiday on Monday, Mr. Pip?”

“Why, I suppose you have not done such a thing these twelve months.”

“These twelve years, more likely,” said Wemmick. “Yes. I’m going to take a holiday. More than that; I’m going to take a walk. More than that; I’m going to ask you to take a walk with me.”

I was about to excuse myself, as being but a bad companion just then, when Wemmick anticipated me.

“I know your engagements,” said he, “and I know you are out of sorts, Mr. Pip. But if you could oblige me, I should take it as a kindness. It ain’t a long walk, and it’s an early one. Say it might occupy you (including breakfast on the walk) from eight to twelve. Couldn’t you stretch a point and manage it?”

He had done so much for me at various times, that this was very little to do for him. I said I could manage it,—would manage it,—and he was so very much pleased by my acquiescence, that I was pleased too. At his particular request, I appointed to call for him at the Castle at half past eight on Monday morning, and so we parted for the time.

Punctual to my appointment, I rang at the Castle gate on the Monday morning, and was received by Wemmick himself, who struck me as looking tighter than usual, and having a sleeker hat on. Within, there were two glasses of rum and milk prepared, and two biscuits. The Aged must have been stirring with the lark, for, glancing into the perspective of his bedroom, I observed that his bed was empty.

When we had fortified ourselves with the rum and milk and biscuits, and were going out for the walk with that training preparation on us, I was considerably surprised to see Wemmick take up a fishing-rod, and put it over his shoulder. “Why, we are not going fishing!” said I. “No,” returned Wemmick, “but I like to walk with one.”

I thought this odd; however, I said nothing, and we set off. We went towards Camberwell Green, and when we were thereabouts, Wemmick said suddenly,—

“Halloa! Here’s a church!”

There was nothing very surprising in that; but again, I was rather surprised, when he said, as if he were animated by a brilliant idea,—

“Let’s go in!”

We went in, Wemmick leaving his fishing-rod in the porch, and looked all round. In the mean time, Wemmick was diving into his coat-pockets, and getting something out of paper there.

“Halloa!” said he. “Here’s a couple of pair of gloves! Let’s put ’em on!”

As the gloves were white kid gloves, and as the post-office was widened to its utmost extent, I now began to have my strong suspicions. They were strengthened into certainty when I beheld the Aged enter at a side door, escorting a lady.

“Halloa!” said Wemmick. “Here’s Miss Skiffins! Let’s have a wedding.”

That discreet damsel was attired as usual, except that she was now engaged in substituting for her green kid gloves a pair of white. The Aged was likewise occupied in preparing a similar sacrifice for the altar of Hymen. The old gentleman, however, experienced so much difficulty in getting his gloves on, that Wemmick found it necessary to put him with his back against a pillar, and then to get behind the pillar himself and pull away at them, while I for my part held the old gentleman round the waist, that he might present an equal and safe resistance. By dint of this ingenious scheme, his gloves were got on to perfection.

The clerk and clergyman then appearing, we were ranged in order at those fatal rails. True to his notion of seeming to do it all without preparation, I heard Wemmick say to himself, as he took something out of his waistcoat-pocket before the service began, “Halloa! Here’s a ring!”

I acted in the capacity of backer, or best-man, to the bridegroom; while a little limp pew-opener in a soft bonnet like a baby’s, made a feint of being the bosom friend of Miss Skiffins. The responsibility of giving the lady away devolved upon the Aged, which led to the clergyman’s being unintentionally scandalized, and it happened thus. When he said, “Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?” the old gentlemen, not in the least knowing what point of the ceremony we had arrived at, stood most amiably beaming at the ten commandments. Upon which, the clergyman said again, “*Who* giveth this woman to be married to this man?” The old gentleman being still in a state of most estimable unconsciousness, the bridegroom cried out in his accustomed voice, “Now Aged P. you know; who giveth?” To which the Aged replied with great briskness, before saying that he gave, “All right, John, all right, my boy!” And the clergyman came

to so gloomy a pause upon it, that I had doubts for the moment whether we should get completely married that day.

It was completely done, however, and when we were going out of church Wemmick took the cover off the font, and put his white gloves in it, and put the cover on again. Mrs. Wemmick, more heedful of the future, put her white gloves in her pocket and assumed her green. “Now, Mr. Pip,” said Wemmick, triumphantly shouldering the fishing-rod as we came out, “let me ask you whether anybody would suppose this to be a wedding-party!”

Breakfast had been ordered at a pleasant little tavern, a mile or so away upon the rising ground beyond the green; and there was a bagatelle board in the room, in case we should desire to unbend our minds after the solemnity. It was pleasant to observe that Mrs. Wemmick no longer unwound Wemmick’s arm when it adapted itself to her figure, but sat in a high-backed chair against the wall, like a violoncello in its case, and submitted to be embraced as that melodious instrument might have done.

We had an excellent breakfast, and when any one declined anything on table, Wemmick said, “Provided by contract, you know; don’t be afraid of it!” I drank to the new couple, drank to the Aged, drank to the Castle, saluted the bride at parting, and made myself as agreeable as I could.

Wemmick came down to the door with me, and I again shook hands with him, and wished him joy.

“Thankee!” said Wemmick, rubbing his hands. “She’s such a manager of fowls, you have no idea. You shall have some eggs, and judge for yourself. I say, Mr. Pip!” calling me back, and speaking low. “This is altogether a Walworth sentiment, please.”

“I understand. Not to be mentioned in Little Britain,” said I.

Wemmick nodded. “After what you let out the other day, Mr. Jaggers may as well not know of it. He might think my brain was softening, or something of the kind.”

Chapter LVI

HE LAY IN PRISON very ill, during the whole interval between his committal for trial and the coming round of the Sessions. He had broken two ribs, they had wounded one of his lungs, and he breathed with great pain and difficulty, which increased daily. It was a consequence of his hurt that he spoke so low as to be scarcely audible; therefore he spoke very little. But he was ever ready to listen to me; and it became the first duty of my life to say to him, and read to him, what I knew he ought to hear.

Being far too ill to remain in the common prison, he was removed, after the first day or so, into the infirmary. This gave me opportunities of being with him that I could not otherwise have had. And but for his illness he would have been put in irons, for he was regarded as a determined prison-breaker, and I know not what else.

Although I saw him every day, it was for only a short time; hence, the regularly recurring spaces of our separation were long enough to record on his face any slight changes that occurred in his physical state. I do not recollect that I once saw any change in it for the better; he wasted, and became slowly weaker and worse, day by day, from the day when the prison door closed upon him.

The kind of submission or resignation that he showed was that of a man who was tired out. I sometimes derived an impression, from his manner or from a whispered word or two which escaped him, that he pondered over the question whether he might have been a better man under better circumstances. But he never justified himself by a hint tending that way, or tried to bend the past out of its eternal shape.

It happened on two or three occasions in my presence, that his desperate reputation was alluded to by one or other of the people in attendance on him. A smile crossed his face then, and he turned his eyes on me with a

trustful look, as if he were confident that I had seen some small redeeming touch in him, even so long ago as when I was a little child. As to all the rest, he was humble and contrite, and I never knew him complain.

When the Sessions came round, Mr. Jaggers caused an application to be made for the postponement of his trial until the following Sessions. It was obviously made with the assurance that he could not live so long, and was refused. The trial came on at once, and, when he was put to the bar, he was seated in a chair. No objection was made to my getting close to the dock, on the outside of it, and holding the hand that he stretched forth to me.

The trial was very short and very clear. Such things as could be said for him were said,—how he had taken to industrious habits, and had thriven lawfully and reputably. But nothing could unsay the fact that he had returned, and was there in presence of the Judge and Jury. It was impossible to try him for that, and do otherwise than find him guilty.

At that time, it was the custom (as I learnt from my terrible experience of that Sessions) to devote a concluding day to the passing of Sentences, and to make a finishing effect with the Sentence of Death. But for the indelible picture that my remembrance now holds before me, I could scarcely believe, even as I write these words, that I saw two-and-thirty men and women put before the Judge to receive that sentence together. Foremost among the two-and-thirty was he; seated, that he might get breath enough to keep life in him.

The whole scene starts out again in the vivid colors of the moment, down to the drops of April rain on the windows of the court, glittering in the rays of April sun. Penned in the dock, as I again stood outside it at the corner with his hand in mine, were the two-and-thirty men and women; some defiant, some stricken with terror, some sobbing and weeping, some covering their faces, some staring gloomily about. There had been shrieks from among the women convicts; but they had been stilled, and a hush had succeeded. The sheriffs with their great chains and nosegays, other civic gewgaws and monsters, criers, ushers, a great gallery full of people,—a large theatrical audience,—looked on, as the two-and-thirty and the Judge were solemnly confronted. Then the Judge addressed them. Among the wretched creatures before him whom he must single out for special address was one who almost from his infancy had been an offender against the laws; who, after repeated imprisonments and punishments, had been at

length sentenced to exile for a term of years; and who, under circumstances of great violence and daring, had made his escape and been re-sentenced to exile for life. That miserable man would seem for a time to have become convinced of his errors, when far removed from the scenes of his old offences, and to have lived a peaceable and honest life. But in a fatal moment, yielding to those propensities and passions, the indulgence of which had so long rendered him a scourge to society, he had quitted his haven of rest and repentance, and had come back to the country where he was proscribed. Being here presently denounced, he had for a time succeeded in evading the officers of Justice, but being at length seized while in the act of flight, he had resisted them, and had—he best knew whether by express design, or in the blindness of his hardihood—caused the death of his denouncer, to whom his whole career was known. The appointed punishment for his return to the land that had cast him out, being Death, and his case being this aggravated case, he must prepare himself to Die.

The sun was striking in at the great windows of the court, through the glittering drops of rain upon the glass, and it made a broad shaft of light between the two-and-thirty and the Judge, linking both together, and perhaps reminding some among the audience how both were passing on, with absolute equality, to the greater Judgment that knoweth all things, and cannot err. Rising for a moment, a distinct speck of face in this way of light, the prisoner said, “My Lord, I have received my sentence of Death from the Almighty, but I bow to yours,” and sat down again. There was some hushing, and the Judge went on with what he had to say to the rest. Then they were all formally doomed, and some of them were supported out, and some of them sauntered out with a haggard look of bravery, and a few nodded to the gallery, and two or three shook hands, and others went out chewing the fragments of herb they had taken from the sweet herbs lying about. He went last of all, because of having to be helped from his chair, and to go very slowly; and he held my hand while all the others were removed, and while the audience got up (putting their dresses right, as they might at church or elsewhere), and pointed down at this criminal or at that, and most of all at him and me.

I earnestly hoped and prayed that he might die before the Recorder’s Report was made; but, in the dread of his lingering on, I began that night to

write out a petition to the Home Secretary of State, setting forth my knowledge of him, and how it was that he had come back for my sake. I wrote it as fervently and pathetically as I could; and when I had finished it and sent it in, I wrote out other petitions to such men in authority as I hoped were the most merciful, and drew up one to the Crown itself. For several days and nights after he was sentenced I took no rest except when I fell asleep in my chair, but was wholly absorbed in these appeals. And after I had sent them in, I could not keep away from the places where they were, but felt as if they were more hopeful and less desperate when I was near them. In this unreasonable restlessness and pain of mind I would roam the streets of an evening, wandering by those offices and houses where I had left the petitions. To the present hour, the weary western streets of London on a cold, dusty spring night, with their ranges of stern, shut-up mansions, and their long rows of lamps, are melancholy to me from this association.

The daily visits I could make him were shortened now, and he was more strictly kept. Seeing, or fancying, that I was suspected of an intention of carrying poison to him, I asked to be searched before I sat down at his bedside, and told the officer who was always there, that I was willing to do anything that would assure him of the singleness of my designs. Nobody was hard with him or with me. There was duty to be done, and it was done, but not harshly. The officer always gave me the assurance that he was worse, and some other sick prisoners in the room, and some other prisoners who attended on them as sick nurses, (malefactors, but not incapable of kindness, God be thanked!) always joined in the same report.

As the days went on, I noticed more and more that he would lie placidly looking at the white ceiling, with an absence of light in his face until some word of mine brightened it for an instant, and then it would subside again. Sometimes he was almost or quite unable to speak, then he would answer me with slight pressures on my hand, and I grew to understand his meaning very well.

The number of the days had risen to ten, when I saw a greater change in him than I had seen yet. His eyes were turned towards the door, and lighted up as I entered.

“Dear boy,” he said, as I sat down by his bed: “I thought you was late. But I knowed you couldn’t be that.”

“It is just the time,” said I. “I waited for it at the gate.”

“You always waits at the gate; don’t you, dear boy?”

“Yes. Not to lose a moment of the time.”

“Thank’ee dear boy, thank’ee. God bless you! You’ve never deserted me, dear boy.”

I pressed his hand in silence, for I could not forget that I had once meant to desert him.

“And what’s the best of all,” he said, “you’ve been more comfortable alonger me, since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone. That’s best of all.”

He lay on his back, breathing with great difficulty. Do what he would, and love me though he did, the light left his face ever and again, and a film came over the placid look at the white ceiling.

“Are you in much pain to-day?”

“I don’t complain of none, dear boy.”

“You never do complain.”

He had spoken his last words. He smiled, and I understood his touch to mean that he wished to lift my hand, and lay it on his breast. I laid it there, and he smiled again, and put both his hands upon it.

The allotted time ran out, while we were thus; but, looking round, I found the governor of the prison standing near me, and he whispered, “You needn’t go yet.” I thanked him gratefully, and asked, “Might I speak to him, if he can hear me?”

The governor stepped aside, and beckoned the officer away. The change, though it was made without noise, drew back the film from the placid look at the white ceiling, and he looked most affectionately at me.

“Dear Magwitch, I must tell you now, at last. You understand what I say?”

A gentle pressure on my hand.

“You had a child once, whom you loved and lost.”

A stronger pressure on my hand.

“She lived, and found powerful friends. She is living now. She is a lady and very beautiful. And I love her!”

With a last faint effort, which would have been powerless but for my yielding to it and assisting it, he raised my hand to his lips. Then, he gently let it sink upon his breast again, with his own hands lying on it. The placid look at the white ceiling came back, and passed away, and his head dropped

quietly on his breast.

Mindful, then, of what we had read together, I thought of the two men who went up into the Temple to pray, and I knew there were no better words that I could say beside his bed, than “O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner!”

Chapter LVII

NOW THAT I WAS left wholly to myself, I gave notice of my intention to quit the chambers in the Temple as soon as my tenancy could legally determine, and in the meanwhile to underlet them. At once I put bills up in the windows; for, I was in debt, and had scarcely any money, and began to be seriously alarmed by the state of my affairs. I ought rather to write that I should have been alarmed if I had had energy and concentration enough to help me to the clear perception of any truth beyond the fact that I was falling very ill. The late stress upon me had enabled me to put off illness, but not to put it away; I knew that it was coming on me now, and I knew very little else, and was even careless as to that.

For a day or two, I lay on the sofa, or on the floor,—anywhere, according as I happened to sink down,—with a heavy head and aching limbs, and no purpose, and no power. Then there came, one night which appeared of great duration, and which teemed with anxiety and horror; and when in the morning I tried to sit up in my bed and think of it, I found I could not do so.

Whether I really had been down in Garden Court in the dead of the night, groping about for the boat that I supposed to be there; whether I had two or three times come to myself on the staircase with great terror, not knowing how I had got out of bed; whether I had found myself lighting the lamp, possessed by the idea that he was coming up the stairs, and that the lights were blown out; whether I had been inexpressibly harassed by the distracted talking, laughing, and groaning of some one, and had half suspected those sounds to be of my own making; whether there had been a closed iron furnace in a dark corner of the room, and a voice had called out, over and over again, that Miss Havisham was consuming within it,—these were things that I tried to settle with myself and get into some order, as I lay

that morning on my bed. But the vapor of a limekiln would come between me and them, disordering them all, and it was through the vapor at last that I saw two men looking at me.

“What do you want?” I asked, starting; “I don’t know you.”

“Well, sir,” returned one of them, bending down and touching me on the shoulder, “this is a matter that you’ll soon arrange, I dare say, but you’re arrested.”

“What is the debt?”

“Hundred and twenty-three pound, fifteen, six. Jeweller’s account, I think.”

“What is to be done?”

“You had better come to my house,” said the man. “I keep a very nice house.”

I made some attempt to get up and dress myself. When I next attended to them, they were standing a little off from the bed, looking at me. I still lay there.

“You see my state,” said I. “I would come with you if I could; but indeed I am quite unable. If you take me from here, I think I shall die by the way.”

Perhaps they replied, or argued the point, or tried to encourage me to believe that I was better than I thought. Forasmuch as they hang in my memory by only this one slender thread, I don’t know what they did, except that they forbore to remove me.

That I had a fever and was avoided, that I suffered greatly, that I often lost my reason, that the time seemed interminable, that I confounded impossible existences with my own identity; that I was a brick in the house-wall, and yet entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me; that I was a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf, and yet that I implored in my own person to have the engine stopped, and my part in it hammered off; that I passed through these phases of disease, I know of my own remembrance, and did in some sort know at the time. That I sometimes struggled with real people, in the belief that they were murderers, and that I would all at once comprehend that they meant to do me good, and would then sink exhausted in their arms, and suffer them to lay me down, I also knew at the time. But, above all, I knew that there was a constant tendency in all these people,—who, when I was very ill, would present all kinds of extraordinary transformations of the

human face, and would be much dilated in size,—above all, I say, I knew that there was an extraordinary tendency in all these people, sooner or later, to settle down into the likeness of Joe.

After I had turned the worst point of my illness, I began to notice that while all its other features changed, this one consistent feature did not change. Whoever came about me, still settled down into Joe. I opened my eyes in the night, and I saw, in the great chair at the bedside, Joe. I opened my eyes in the day, and, sitting on the window-seat, smoking his pipe in the shaded open window, still I saw Joe. I asked for cooling drink, and the dear hand that gave it me was Joe's. I sank back on my pillow after drinking, and the face that looked so hopefully and tenderly upon me was the face of Joe.

At last, one day, I took courage, and said, "Is it Joe?"

And the dear old home-voice answered, "Which it air, old chap."

"O Joe, you break my heart! Look angry at me, Joe. Strike me, Joe. Tell me of my ingratitude. Don't be so good to me!"

For Joe had actually laid his head down on the pillow at my side, and put his arm round my neck, in his joy that I knew him.

"Which dear old Pip, old chap," said Joe, "you and me was ever friends. And when you're well enough to go out for a ride—what larks!"

After which, Joe withdrew to the window, and stood with his back towards me, wiping his eyes. And as my extreme weakness prevented me from getting up and going to him, I lay there, penitently whispering, "O God bless him! O God bless this gentle Christian man!"

Joe's eyes were red when I next found him beside me; but I was holding his hand, and we both felt happy.

"How long, dear Joe?"

"Which you meantersay, Pip, how long have your illness lasted, dear old chap?"

"Yes, Joe."

"It's the end of May, Pip. To-morrow is the first of June."

"And have you been here all that time, dear Joe?"

"Pretty nigh, old chap. For, as I says to Biddy when the news of your being ill were brought by letter, which it were brought by the post, and being formerly single he is now married though underpaid for a deal of walking and shoe-leather, but wealth were not a object on his part, and marriage were the great wish of his hart—"

“It is so delightful to hear you, Joe! But I interrupt you in what you said to Biddy.”

“Which it were,” said Joe, “that how you might be amongst strangers, and that how you and me having been ever friends, a wisit at such a moment might not prove unacceptabobble. And Biddy, her word were, ‘Go to him, without loss of time.’ That,” said Joe, summing up with his judicial air, “were the word of Biddy. ‘Go to him,’ Biddy say, ‘without loss of time.’ In short, I shouldn’t greatly deceive you,” Joe added, after a little grave reflection, “if I represented to you that the word of that young woman were, ‘without a minute’s loss of time.’”

There Joe cut himself short, and informed me that I was to be talked to in great moderation, and that I was to take a little nourishment at stated frequent times, whether I felt inclined for it or not, and that I was to submit myself to all his orders. So I kissed his hand, and lay quiet, while he proceeded to indite a note to Biddy, with my love in it.

Evidently Biddy had taught Joe to write. As I lay in bed looking at him, it made me, in my weak state, cry again with pleasure to see the pride with which he set about his letter. My bedstead, divested of its curtains, had been removed, with me upon it, into the sitting-room, as the airiest and largest, and the carpet had been taken away, and the room kept always fresh and wholesome night and day. At my own writing-table, pushed into a corner and cumbered with little bottles, Joe now sat down to his great work, first choosing a pen from the pen-tray as if it were a chest of large tools, and tucking up his sleeves as if he were going to wield a crow-bar or sledgehammer. It was necessary for Joe to hold on heavily to the table with his left elbow, and to get his right leg well out behind him, before he could begin; and when he did begin he made every down-stroke so slowly that it might have been six feet long, while at every up-stroke I could hear his pen spluttering extensively. He had a curious idea that the inkstand was on the side of him where it was not, and constantly dipped his pen into space, and seemed quite satisfied with the result. Occasionally, he was tripped up by some orthographical stumbling-block; but on the whole he got on very well indeed; and when he had signed his name, and had removed a finishing blot from the paper to the crown of his head with his two forefingers, he got up and hovered about the table, trying the effect of his performance from various points of view, as it lay there, with unbounded satisfaction.

Not to make Joe uneasy by talking too much, even if I had been able to talk much, I deferred asking him about Miss Havisham until next day. He shook his head when I then asked him if she had recovered.

"Is she dead, Joe?"

"Why you see, old chap," said Joe, in a tone of remonstrance, and by way of getting at it by degrees, "I wouldn't go so far as to say that, for that's a deal to say; but she ain't—"

"Living, Joe?"

"That's nigher where it is," said Joe; "she ain't living."

"Did she linger long, Joe?"

"Arter you was took ill, pretty much about what you might call (if you was put to it) a week," said Joe; still determined, on my account, to come at everything by degrees.

"Dear Joe, have you heard what becomes of her property?"

"Well, old chap," said Joe, "it do appear that she had settled the most of it, which I meantersay tied it up, on Miss Estella. But she had wrote out a little coddleshell in her own hand a day or two afore the accident, leaving a cool four thousand to Mr. Matthew Pocket. And why, do you suppose, above all things, Pip, she left that cool four thousand unto him? 'Because of Pip's account of him, the said Matthew.' I am told by Biddy, that air the writing," said Joe, repeating the legal turn as if it did him infinite good, "'account of him the said Matthew.' And a cool four thousand, Pip!"

I never discovered from whom Joe derived the conventional temperature of the four thousand pounds; but it appeared to make the sum of money more to him, and he had a manifest relish in insisting on its being cool.

This account gave me great joy, as it perfected the only good thing I had done. I asked Joe whether he had heard if any of the other relations had any legacies?

"Miss Sarah," said Joe, "she have twenty-five pound perannium fur to buy pills, on account of being bilious. Miss Georgiana, she have twenty pound down. Mrs.—what's the name of them wild beasts with humps, old chap?"

"Camels?" said I, wondering why he could possibly want to know.

Joe nodded. "Mrs. Camels," by which I presently understood he meant Camilla, "she have five pound fur to buy rushlights to put her in spirits when she wake up in the night."

The accuracy of these recitals was sufficiently obvious to me, to give me great confidence in Joe's information. "And now," said Joe, "you ain't that strong yet, old chap, that you can take in more nor one additional shovelful to-day. Old Orlick he's been a bustin' open a dwelling-ouse."

"Whose?" said I.

"Not, I grant you, but what his manners is given to blusterous," said Joe, apologetically; "still, a Englishman's ouse is his Castle, and castles must not be busted 'cept when done in war time. And wotsume'er the failings on his part, he were a corn and seedsman in his hart."

"Is it Pumblechook's house that has been broken into, then?"

"That's it, Pip," said Joe; "and they took his till, and they took his cash-box, and they drinked his wine, and they partook of his wittles, and they slapped his face, and they pulled his nose, and they tied him up to his bedpust, and they giv' him a dozen, and they stuffed his mouth full of flowering annuals to prewent his crying out. But he knowed Orlick, and Orlick's in the county jail."

By these approaches we arrived at unrestricted conversation. I was slow to gain strength, but I did slowly and surely become less weak, and Joe stayed with me, and I fancied I was little Pip again.

For the tenderness of Joe was so beautifully proportioned to my need, that I was like a child in his hands. He would sit and talk to me in the old confidence, and with the old simplicity, and in the old unassertive protecting way, so that I would half believe that all my life since the days of the old kitchen was one of the mental troubles of the fever that was gone. He did everything for me except the household work, for which he had engaged a very decent woman, after paying off the laundress on his first arrival. "Which I do assure you, Pip," he would often say, in explanation of that liberty; "I found her a tapping the spare bed, like a cask of beer, and drawing off the feathers in a bucket, for sale. Which she would have tapped yourn next, and draw'd it off with you a laying on it, and was then a carrying away the coals gradiwally in the soup-tureen and wegetable-dishes, and the wine and spirits in your Wellington boots."

We looked forward to the day when I should go out for a ride, as we had once looked forward to the day of my apprenticeship. And when the day came, and an open carriage was got into the Lane, Joe wrapped me up, took me in his arms, carried me down to it, and put me in, as if I were still the

small helpless creature to whom he had so abundantly given of the wealth of his great nature.

And Joe got in beside me, and we drove away together into the country, where the rich summer growth was already on the trees and on the grass, and sweet summer scents filled all the air. The day happened to be Sunday, and when I looked on the loveliness around me, and thought how it had grown and changed, and how the little wild-flowers had been forming, and the voices of the birds had been strengthening, by day and by night, under the sun and under the stars, while poor I lay burning and tossing on my bed, the mere remembrance of having burned and tossed there came like a check upon my peace. But when I heard the Sunday bells, and looked around a little more upon the outspread beauty, I felt that I was not nearly thankful enough,—that I was too weak yet to be even that,—and I laid my head on Joe's shoulder, as I had laid it long ago when he had taken me to the Fair or where not, and it was too much for my young senses.

More composure came to me after a while, and we talked as we used to talk, lying on the grass at the old Battery. There was no change whatever in Joe. Exactly what he had been in my eyes then, he was in my eyes still; just as simply faithful, and as simply right.

When we got back again, and he lifted me out, and carried me—so easily!—across the court and up the stairs, I thought of that eventful Christmas Day when he had carried me over the marshes. We had not yet made any allusion to my change of fortune, nor did I know how much of my late history he was acquainted with. I was so doubtful of myself now, and put so much trust in him, that I could not satisfy myself whether I ought to refer to it when he did not.

"Have you heard, Joe," I asked him that evening, upon further consideration, as he smoked his pipe at the window, "who my patron was?"

"I heerd," returned Joe, "as it were not Miss Havisham, old chap."

"Did you hear who it was, Joe?"

"Well! I heerd as it were a person what sent the person what giv' you the bank-notes at the Jolly Bargemen, Pip."

"So it was."

"Astonishing!" said Joe, in the placidest way.

"Did you hear that he was dead, Joe?" I presently asked, with increasing diffidence.

“Which? Him as sent the bank-notes, Pip?”

“Yes.”

“I think,” said Joe, after meditating a long time, and looking rather evasively at the window-seat, “as I did hear tell that how he were something or another in a general way in that direction.”

“Did you hear anything of his circumstances, Joe?”

“Not partickler, Pip.”

“If you would like to hear, Joe—” I was beginning, when Joe got up and came to my sofa.

“Lookee here, old chap,” said Joe, bending over me. “Ever the best of friends; ain’t us, Pip?”

I was ashamed to answer him.

“Wery good, then,” said Joe, as if I had answered; “that’s all right; that’s agreed upon. Then why go into subjects, old chap, which as betwixt two sech must be for ever onnecessary? There’s subjects enough as betwixt two sech, without onnecessary ones. Lord! To think of your poor sister and her Rampages! And don’t you remember Tickler?”

“I do indeed, Joe.”

“Lookee here, old chap,” said Joe. “I done what I could to keep you and Tickler in sunders, but my power were not always fully equal to my inclinations. For when your poor sister had a mind to drop into you, it were not so much,” said Joe, in his favorite argumentative way, “that she dropped into me too, if I put myself in opposition to her, but that she dropped into you always heavier for it. I noticed that. It ain’t a grab at a man’s whisker, not yet a shake or two of a man (to which your sister was quite welcome), that ’ud put a man off from getting a little child out of punishment. But when that little child is dropped into heavier for that grab of whisker or shaking, then that man naterally up and says to himself, ‘Where is the good as you are a doing? I grant you I see the ’arm,’ says the man, ‘but I don’t see the good. I call upon you, sir, therefore, to pint out the good.’”

“The man says?” I observed, as Joe waited for me to speak.

“The man says,” Joe assented. “Is he right, that man?”

“Dear Joe, he is always right.”

“Well, old chap,” said Joe, “then abide by your words. If he’s always right (which in general he’s more likely wrong), he’s right when he says this: Supposing ever you kep any little matter to yourself, when you was a

little child, you kep it mostly because you know'd as J. Gargery's power to part you and Tickler in sunders were not fully equal to his inclinations. Theerfore, think no more of it as betwixt two sech, and do not let us pass remarks upon onnecessary subjects. Biddy giv' herself a deal o' trouble with me afore I left (for I am almost awful dull), as I should view it in this light, and, viewing it in this light, as I should so put it. Both of which," said Joe, quite charmed with his logical arrangement, "being done, now this to you a true friend, say. Namely. You mustn't go a overdoing on it, but you must have your supper and your wine and water, and you must be put betwixt the sheets."

The delicacy with which Joe dismissed this theme, and the sweet tact and kindness with which Biddy—who with her woman's wit had found me out so soon—had prepared him for it, made a deep impression on my mind. But whether Joe knew how poor I was, and how my great expectations had all dissolved, like our own marsh mists before the sun, I could not understand.

Another thing in Joe that I could not understand when it first began to develop itself, but which I soon arrived at a sorrowful comprehension of, was this: As I became stronger and better, Joe became a little less easy with me. In my weakness and entire dependence on him, the dear fellow had fallen into the old tone, and called me by the old names, the dear "old Pip, old chap," that now were music in my ears. I too had fallen into the old ways, only happy and thankful that he let me. But, imperceptibly, though I held by them fast, Joe's hold upon them began to slacken; and whereas I wondered at this, at first, I soon began to understand that the cause of it was in me, and that the fault of it was all mine.

Ah! Had I given Joe no reason to doubt my constancy, and to think that in prosperity I should grow cold to him and cast him off? Had I given Joe's innocent heart no cause to feel instinctively that as I got stronger, his hold upon me would be weaker, and that he had better loosen it in time and let me go, before I plucked myself away?

It was on the third or fourth occasion of my going out walking in the Temple Gardens leaning on Joe's arm, that I saw this change in him very plainly. We had been sitting in the bright warm sunlight, looking at the river, and I chanced to say as we got up,—

"See, Joe! I can walk quite strongly. Now, you shall see me walk back by

myself.”

“Which do not overdo it, Pip,” said Joe; “but I shall be happy fur to see you able, sir.”

The last word grated on me; but how could I remonstrate! I walked no further than the gate of the gardens, and then pretended to be weaker than I was, and asked Joe for his arm. Joe gave it me, but was thoughtful.

I, for my part, was thoughtful too; for, how best to check this growing change in Joe was a great perplexity to my remorseful thoughts. That I was ashamed to tell him exactly how I was placed, and what I had come down to, I do not seek to conceal; but I hope my reluctance was not quite an unworthy one. He would want to help me out of his little savings, I knew, and I knew that he ought not to help me, and that I must not suffer him to do it.

It was a thoughtful evening with both of us. But, before we went to bed, I had resolved that I would wait over to-morrow,—to-morrow being Sunday,—and would begin my new course with the new week. On Monday morning I would speak to Joe about this change, I would lay aside this last vestige of reserve, I would tell him what I had in my thoughts (that Secondly, not yet arrived at), and why I had not decided to go out to Herbert, and then the change would be conquered for ever. As I cleared, Joe cleared, and it seemed as though he had sympathetically arrived at a resolution too.

We had a quiet day on the Sunday, and we rode out into the country, and then walked in the fields.

“I feel thankful that I have been ill, Joe,” I said.

“Dear old Pip, old chap, you’re a’most come round, sir.”

“It has been a memorable time for me, Joe.”

“Likeways for myself, sir,” Joe returned.

“We have had a time together, Joe, that I can never forget. There were days once, I know, that I did for a while forget; but I never shall forget these.”

“Pip,” said Joe, appearing a little hurried and troubled, “there has been larks. And, dear sir, what have been betwixt us—have been.”

At night, when I had gone to bed, Joe came into my room, as he had done all through my recovery. He asked me if I felt sure that I was as well as in the morning?

“Yes, dear Joe, quite.”

“And are always a getting stronger, old chap?”

“Yes, dear Joe, steadily.”

Joe patted the coverlet on my shoulder with his great good hand, and said, in what I thought a husky voice, “Good night!”

When I got up in the morning, refreshed and stronger yet, I was full of my resolution to tell Joe all, without delay. I would tell him before breakfast. I would dress at once and go to his room and surprise him; for, it was the first day I had been up early. I went to his room, and he was not there. Not only was he not there, but his box was gone.

I hurried then to the breakfast-table, and on it found a letter. These were its brief contents:—

“Not wishful to intrude I have departured fur you are well again dear Pip and will do better without JO.

“P.S. Ever the best of friends.”

Enclosed in the letter was a receipt for the debt and costs on which I had been arrested. Down to that moment, I had vainly supposed that my creditor had withdrawn, or suspended proceedings until I should be quite recovered. I had never dreamed of Joe’s having paid the money; but Joe had paid it, and the receipt was in his name.

What remained for me now, but to follow him to the dear old forge, and there to have out my disclosure to him, and my penitent remonstrance with him, and there to relieve my mind and heart of that reserved Secondly, which had begun as a vague something lingering in my thoughts, and had formed into a settled purpose?

The purpose was, that I would go to Biddy, that I would show her how humbled and repentant I came back, that I would tell her how I had lost all I once hoped for, that I would remind her of our old confidences in my first unhappy time. Then I would say to her, “Biddy, I think you once liked me very well, when my errant heart, even while it strayed away from you, was quieter and better with you than it ever has been since. If you can like me only half as well once more, if you can take me with all my faults and disappointments on my head, if you can receive me like a forgiven child (and indeed I am as sorry, Biddy, and have as much need of a hushing voice and a soothing hand), I hope I am a little worthier of you that I was,—not much, but a little. And, Biddy, it shall rest with you to say whether I shall

work at the forge with Joe, or whether I shall try for any different occupation down in this country, or whether we shall go away to a distant place where an opportunity awaits me which I set aside, when it was offered, until I knew your answer. And now, dear Biddy, if you can tell me that you will go through the world with me, you will surely make it a better world for me, and me a better man for it, and I will try hard to make it a better world for you."

Such was my purpose. After three days more of recovery, I went down to the old place to put it in execution. And how I sped in it is all I have left to tell.

Chapter LVIII

THE TIDINGS OF MY high fortunes having had a heavy fall had got down to my native place and its neighborhood before I got there. I found the Blue Boar in possession of the intelligence, and I found that it made a great change in the Boar's demeanour. Whereas the Boar had cultivated my good opinion with warm assiduity when I was coming into property, the Boar was exceedingly cool on the subject now that I was going out of property.

It was evening when I arrived, much fatigued by the journey I had so often made so easily. The Boar could not put me into my usual bedroom, which was engaged (probably by some one who had expectations), and could only assign me a very indifferent chamber among the pigeons and post-chaises up the yard. But I had as sound a sleep in that lodging as in the most superior accommodation the Boar could have given me, and the quality of my dreams was about the same as in the best bedroom.

Early in the morning, while my breakfast was getting ready, I strolled round by Satis House. There were printed bills on the gate and on bits of carpet hanging out of the windows, announcing a sale by auction of the Household Furniture and Effects, next week. The House itself was to be sold as old building materials, and pulled down. LOT 1 was marked in whitewashed knock-knee letters on the brew house; LOT 2 on that part of the main building which had been so long shut up. Other lots were marked off on other parts of the structure, and the ivy had been torn down to make room for the inscriptions, and much of it trailed low in the dust and was withered already. Stepping in for a moment at the open gate, and looking around me with the uncomfortable air of a stranger who had no business there, I saw the auctioneer's clerk walking on the casks and telling them off for the information of a catalogue-compiler, pen in hand, who made a temporary desk of the wheeled chair I had so often pushed along to the tune

of Old Clem.

When I got back to my breakfast in the Boar's coffee-room, I found Mr. Pumblechook conversing with the landlord. Mr. Pumblechook (not improved in appearance by his late nocturnal adventure) was waiting for me, and addressed me in the following terms:—

"Young man, I am sorry to see you brought low. But what else could be expected! what else could be expected!"

As he extended his hand with a magnificently forgiving air, and as I was broken by illness and unfit to quarrel, I took it.

"William," said Mr. Pumblechook to the waiter, "put a muffin on table. And has it come to this! Has it come to this!"

I frowningly sat down to my breakfast. Mr. Pumblechook stood over me and poured out my tea—before I could touch the teapot—with the air of a benefactor who was resolved to be true to the last.

"William," said Mr. Pumblechook, mournfully, "put the salt on. In happier times," addressing me, "I think you took sugar? And did you take milk? You did. Sugar and milk. William, bring a watercress."

"Thank you," said I, shortly, "but I don't eat watercresses."

"You don't eat 'em," returned Mr. Pumblechook, sighing and nodding his head several times, as if he might have expected that, and as if abstinence from watercresses were consistent with my downfall. "True. The simple fruits of the earth. No. You needn't bring any, William."

I went on with my breakfast, and Mr. Pumblechook continued to stand over me, staring fishily and breathing noisily, as he always did.

"Little more than skin and bone!" mused Mr. Pumblechook, aloud. "And yet when he went from here (I may say with my blessing), and I spread afore him my humble store, like the Bee, he was as plump as a Peach!"

This reminded me of the wonderful difference between the servile manner in which he had offered his hand in my new prosperity, saying, "May I?" and the ostentatious clemency with which he had just now exhibited the same fat five fingers.

"Hah!" he went on, handing me the bread and butter. "And air you a going to Joseph?"

"In heaven's name," said I, firing in spite of myself, "what does it matter to you where I am going? Leave that teapot alone."

It was the worst course I could have taken, because it gave Pumblechook

the opportunity he wanted.

“Yes, young man,” said he, releasing the handle of the article in question, retiring a step or two from my table, and speaking for the behoof of the landlord and waiter at the door, “I will leave that teapot alone. You are right, young man. For once you are right. I forgit myself when I take such an interest in your breakfast, as to wish your frame, exhausted by the debilitating effects of prodigygality, to be stimilated by the ’olesome nourishment of your forefathers. And yet,” said Pumblechook, turning to the landlord and waiter, and pointing me out at arm’s length, “this is him as I ever sported with in his days of happy infancy! Tell me not it cannot be; I tell you this is him!”

A low murmur from the two replied. The waiter appeared to be particularly affected.

“This is him,” said Pumblechook, “as I have rode in my shay-cart. This is him as I have seen brought up by hand. This is him untoe the sister of which I was uncle by marriage, as her name was Georgiana M’ria from her own mother, let him deny it if he can!”

The waiter seemed convinced that I could not deny it, and that it gave the case a black look.

“Young man,” said Pumblechook, screwing his head at me in the old fashion, “you air a going to Joseph. What does it matter to me, you ask me, where you air a going? I say to you, Sir, you air a going to Joseph.”

The waiter coughed, as if he modestly invited me to get over that.

“Now,” said Pumblechook, and all this with a most exasperating air of saying in the cause of virtue what was perfectly convincing and conclusive, “I will tell you what to say to Joseph. Here is Squires of the Boar present, known and respected in this town, and here is William, which his father’s name was Potkins if I do not deceive myself.”

“You do not, sir,” said William.

“In their presence,” pursued Pumblechook, “I will tell you, young man, what to say to Joseph. Says you, ‘Joseph, I have this day seen my earliest benefactor and the founder of my fortun’s. I will name no names, Joseph, but so they are pleased to call him up town, and I have seen that man.’”

“I swear I don’t see him here,” said I.

“Say that likewise,” retorted Pumblechook. “Say you said that, and even Joseph will probably betray surprise.”

“There you quite mistake him,” said I. “I know better.”

“Says you,” Pumblechook went on, “‘Joseph, I have seen that man, and that man bears you no malice and bears me no malice. He knows your character, Joseph, and is well acquainted with your pig-headedness and ignorance; and he knows my character, Joseph, and he knows my want of gratitoode. Yes, Joseph,’ says you,” here Pumblechook shook his head and hand at me, “‘he knows my total deficiency of common human gratitoode. He knows it, Joseph, as none can. You do not know it, Joseph, having no call to know it, but that man do.’”

Windy donkey as he was, it really amazed me that he could have the face to talk thus to mine.

“Says you, ‘Joseph, he gave me a little message, which I will now repeat. It was that, in my being brought low, he saw the finger of Providence. He knowed that finger when he saw Joseph, and he saw it plain. It pinted out this writing, Joseph. Reward of ingratitoode to his earliest benefactor, and founder of fortun’s. But that man said he did not repent of what he had done, Joseph. Not at all. It was right to do it, it was kind to do it, it was benevolent to do it, and he would do it again.’”

“It’s pity,” said I, scornfully, as I finished my interrupted breakfast, “that the man did not say what he had done and would do again.”

“Squires of the Boar!” Pumblechook was now addressing the landlord, “and William! I have no objections to your mentioning, either up town or down town, if such should be your wishes, that it was right to do it, kind to do it, benevolent to do it, and that I would do it again.”

With those words the Impostor shook them both by the hand, with an air, and left the house; leaving me much more astonished than delighted by the virtues of that same indefinite “it.” I was not long after him in leaving the house too, and when I went down the High Street I saw him holding forth (no doubt to the same effect) at his shop door to a select group, who honored me with very unfavorable glances as I passed on the opposite side of the way.

But, it was only the pleasanter to turn to Biddy and to Joe, whose great forbearance shone more brightly than before, if that could be, contrasted with this brazen pretender. I went towards them slowly, for my limbs were weak, but with a sense of increasing relief as I drew nearer to them, and a sense of leaving arrogance and untruthfulness further and further behind.

The June weather was delicious. The sky was blue, the larks were soaring high over the green corn, I thought all that countryside more beautiful and peaceful by far than I had ever known it to be yet. Many pleasant pictures of the life that I would lead there, and of the change for the better that would come over my character when I had a guiding spirit at my side whose simple faith and clear home wisdom I had proved, beguiled my way. They awakened a tender emotion in me; for my heart was softened by my return, and such a change had come to pass, that I felt like one who was toiling home barefoot from distant travel, and whose wanderings had lasted many years.

The schoolhouse where Biddy was mistress I had never seen; but, the little roundabout lane by which I entered the village, for quietness' sake, took me past it. I was disappointed to find that the day was a holiday; no children were there, and Biddy's house was closed. Some hopeful notion of seeing her, busily engaged in her daily duties, before she saw me, had been in my mind and was defeated.

But the forge was a very short distance off, and I went towards it under the sweet green limes, listening for the clink of Joe's hammer. Long after I ought to have heard it, and long after I had fancied I heard it and found it but a fancy, all was still. The limes were there, and the white thorns were there, and the chestnut-trees were there, and their leaves rustled harmoniously when I stopped to listen; but, the clink of Joe's hammer was not in the midsummer wind.

Almost fearing, without knowing why, to come in view of the forge, I saw it at last, and saw that it was closed. No gleam of fire, no glittering shower of sparks, no roar of bellows; all shut up, and still.

But the house was not deserted, and the best parlor seemed to be in use, for there were white curtains fluttering in its window, and the window was open and gay with flowers. I went softly towards it, meaning to peep over the flowers, when Joe and Biddy stood before me, arm in arm.

At first Biddy gave a cry, as if she thought it was my apparition, but in another moment she was in my embrace. I wept to see her, and she wept to see me; I, because she looked so fresh and pleasant; she, because I looked so worn and white.

"But dear Biddy, how smart you are!"

"Yes, dear Pip."

“And Joe, how smart you are!”

“Yes, dear old Pip, old chap.”

I looked at both of them, from one to the other, and then—

“It’s my wedding-day!” cried Biddy, in a burst of happiness, “and I am married to Joe!”

They had taken me into the kitchen, and I had laid my head down on the old deal table. Biddy held one of my hands to her lips, and Joe’s restoring touch was on my shoulder. “Which he warn’t strong enough, my dear, fur to be surprised,” said Joe. And Biddy said, “I ought to have thought of it, dear Joe, but I was too happy.” They were both so overjoyed to see me, so proud to see me, so touched by my coming to them, so delighted that I should have come by accident to make their day complete!

My first thought was one of great thankfulness that I had never breathed this last baffled hope to Joe. How often, while he was with me in my illness, had it risen to my lips! How irrevocable would have been his knowledge of it, if he had remained with me but another hour!

“Dear Biddy,” said I, “you have the best husband in the whole world, and if you could have seen him by my bed you would have— But no, you couldn’t love him better than you do.”

“No, I couldn’t indeed,” said Biddy.

“And, dear Joe, you have the best wife in the whole world, and she will make you as happy as even you deserve to be, you dear, good, noble Joe!”

Joe looked at me with a quivering lip, and fairly put his sleeve before his eyes.

“And Joe and Biddy both, as you have been to church to-day, and are in charity and love with all mankind, receive my humble thanks for all you have done for me, and all I have so ill repaid! And when I say that I am going away within the hour, for I am soon going abroad, and that I shall never rest until I have worked for the money with which you have kept me out of prison, and have sent it to you, don’t think, dear Joe and Biddy, that if I could repay it a thousand times over, I suppose I could cancel a farthing of the debt I owe you, or that I would do so if I could!”

They were both melted by these words, and both entreated me to say no more.

“But I must say more. Dear Joe, I hope you will have children to love, and that some little fellow will sit in this chimney-corner of a winter night,

who may remind you of another little fellow gone out of it for ever. Don't tell him, Joe, that I was thankless; don't tell him, Biddy, that I was ungenerous and unjust; only tell him that I honored you both, because you were both so good and true, and that, as your child, I said it would be natural to him to grow up a much better man than I did."

"I ain't a going," said Joe, from behind his sleeve, "to tell him nothink o' that natur, Pip. Nor Biddy ain't. Nor yet no one ain't."

"And now, though I know you have already done it in your own kind hearts, pray tell me, both, that you forgive me! Pray let me hear you say the words, that I may carry the sound of them away with me, and then I shall be able to believe that you can trust me, and think better of me, in the time to come!"

"O dear old Pip, old chap," said Joe. "God knows as I forgive you, if I have anythink to forgive!"

"Amen! And God knows I do!" echoed Biddy.

"Now let me go up and look at my old little room, and rest there a few minutes by myself. And then, when I have eaten and drunk with you, go with me as far as the finger-post, dear Joe and Biddy, before we say good by!"

I sold all I had, and put aside as much as I could, for a composition with my creditors,—who gave me ample time to pay them in full,—and I went out and joined Herbert. Within a month, I had quitted England, and within two months I was clerk to Clarriker and Co., and within four months I assumed my first undivided responsibility. For the beam across the parlor ceiling at Mill Pond Bank had then ceased to tremble under old Bill Barley's growls and was at peace, and Herbert had gone away to marry Clara, and I was left in sole charge of the Eastern Branch until he brought her back.

Many a year went round before I was a partner in the House; but I lived happily with Herbert and his wife, and lived frugally, and paid my debts, and maintained a constant correspondence with Biddy and Joe. It was not until I became third in the Firm, that Clarriker betrayed me to Herbert; but he then declared that the secret of Herbert's partnership had been long enough upon his conscience, and he must tell it. So he told it, and Herbert was as much moved as amazed, and the dear fellow and I were not the worse friends for the long concealment. I must not leave it to be supposed

that we were ever a great House, or that we made mints of money. We were not in a grand way of business, but we had a good name, and worked for our profits, and did very well. We owed so much to Herbert's ever cheerful industry and readiness, that I often wondered how I had conceived that old idea of his inaptitude, until I was one day enlightened by the reflection, that perhaps the inaptitude had never been in him at all, but had been in me.

Chapter LIX

FOR ELEVEN YEARS, I had not seen Joe nor Biddy with my bodily Eyes,—though they had both been often before my fancy in the East,—when, upon an evening in December, an hour or two after dark, I laid my hand softly on the latch of the old kitchen door. I touched it so softly that I was not heard, and looked in unseen. There, smoking his pipe in the old place by the kitchen firelight, as hale and as strong as ever, though a little gray, sat Joe; and there, fenced into the corner with Joe's leg, and sitting on my own little stool looking at the fire, was—I again!

"We giv' him the name of Pip for your sake, dear old chap," said Joe, delighted, when I took another stool by the child's side (but I did not rumple his hair), "and we hoped he might grow a little bit like you, and we think he do."

I thought so too, and I took him out for a walk next morning, and we talked immensely, understanding one another to perfection. And I took him down to the churchyard, and set him on a certain tombstone there, and he showed me from that elevation which stone was sacred to the memory of Philip Pirrip, late of this Parish, and Also Georgiana, Wife of the Above.

"Biddy," said I, when I talked with her after dinner, as her little girl lay sleeping in her lap, "you must give Pip to me one of these days; or lend him, at all events."

"No, no," said Biddy, gently. "You must marry."

"So Herbert and Clara say, but I don't think I shall, Biddy. I have so settled down in their home, that it's not at all likely. I am already quite an old bachelor."

Biddy looked down at her child, and put its little hand to her lips, and then put the good matronly hand with which she had touched it into mine. There was something in the action, and in the light pressure of Biddy's

wedding-ring, that had a very pretty eloquence in it.

"Dear Pip," said Biddy, "you are sure you don't fret for her?"

"O no,—I think not, Biddy."

"Tell me as an old, old friend. Have you quite forgotten her?

"My dear Biddy, I have forgotten nothing in my life that ever had a foremost place there, and little that ever had any place there. But that poor dream, as I once used to call it, has all gone by, Biddy,—all gone by!"

Nevertheless, I knew, while I said those words, that I secretly intended to revisit the site of the old house that evening, alone, for her sake. Yes, even so. For Estella's sake.

I had heard of her as leading a most unhappy life, and as being separated from her husband, who had used her with great cruelty, and who had become quite renowned as a compound of pride, avarice, brutality, and meanness. And I had heard of the death of her husband, from an accident consequent on his ill-treatment of a horse. This release had befallen her some two years before; for anything I knew, she was married again.

The early dinner hour at Joe's, left me abundance of time, without hurrying my talk with Biddy, to walk over to the old spot before dark. But, what with loitering on the way to look at old objects and to think of old times, the day had quite declined when I came to the place.

There was no house now, no brewery, no building whatever left, but the wall of the old garden. The cleared space had been enclosed with a rough fence, and looking over it, I saw that some of the old ivy had struck root anew, and was growing green on low quiet mounds of ruin. A gate in the fence standing ajar, I pushed it open, and went in.

A cold silvery mist had veiled the afternoon, and the moon was not yet up to scatter it. But, the stars were shining beyond the mist, and the moon was coming, and the evening was not dark. I could trace out where every part of the old house had been, and where the brewery had been, and where the gates, and where the casks. I had done so, and was looking along the desolate garden walk, when I beheld a solitary figure in it.

The figure showed itself aware of me, as I advanced. It had been moving towards me, but it stood still. As I drew nearer, I saw it to be the figure of a woman. As I drew nearer yet, it was about to turn away, when it stopped, and let me come up with it. Then, it faltered, as if much surprised, and uttered my name, and I cried out,—

“Estella!”

“I am greatly changed. I wonder you know me.”

The freshness of her beauty was indeed gone, but its indescribable majesty and its indescribable charm remained. Those attractions in it, I had seen before; what I had never seen before, was the saddened, softened light of the once proud eyes; what I had never felt before was the friendly touch of the once insensible hand.

We sat down on a bench that was near, and I said, “After so many years, it is strange that we should thus meet again, Estella, here where our first meeting was! Do you often come back?”

“I have never been here since.”

“Nor I.”

The moon began to rise, and I thought of the placid look at the white ceiling, which had passed away. The moon began to rise, and I thought of the pressure on my hand when I had spoken the last words he had heard on earth.

Estella was the next to break the silence that ensued between us.

“I have very often hoped and intended to come back, but have been prevented by many circumstances. Poor, poor old place!”

The silvery mist was touched with the first rays of the moonlight, and the same rays touched the tears that dropped from her eyes. Not knowing that I saw them, and setting herself to get the better of them, she said quietly,—

“Were you wondering, as you walked along, how it came to be left in this condition?”

“Yes, Estella.”

“The ground belongs to me. It is the only possession I have not relinquished. Everything else has gone from me, little by little, but I have kept this. It was the subject of the only determined resistance I made in all the wretched years.”

“Is it to be built on?”

“At last, it is. I came here to take leave of it before its change. And you,” she said, in a voice of touching interest to a wanderer,—“you live abroad still?”

“Still.”

“And do well, I am sure?”

“I work pretty hard for a sufficient living, and therefore—yes, I do well.”

“I have often thought of you,” said Estella.

“Have you?”

“Of late, very often. There was a long hard time when I kept far from me the remembrance of what I had thrown away when I was quite ignorant of its worth. But since my duty has not been incompatible with the admission of that remembrance, I have given it a place in my heart.”

“You have always held your place in my heart,” I answered.

And we were silent again until she spoke.

“I little thought,” said Estella, “that I should take leave of you in taking leave of this spot. I am very glad to do so.”

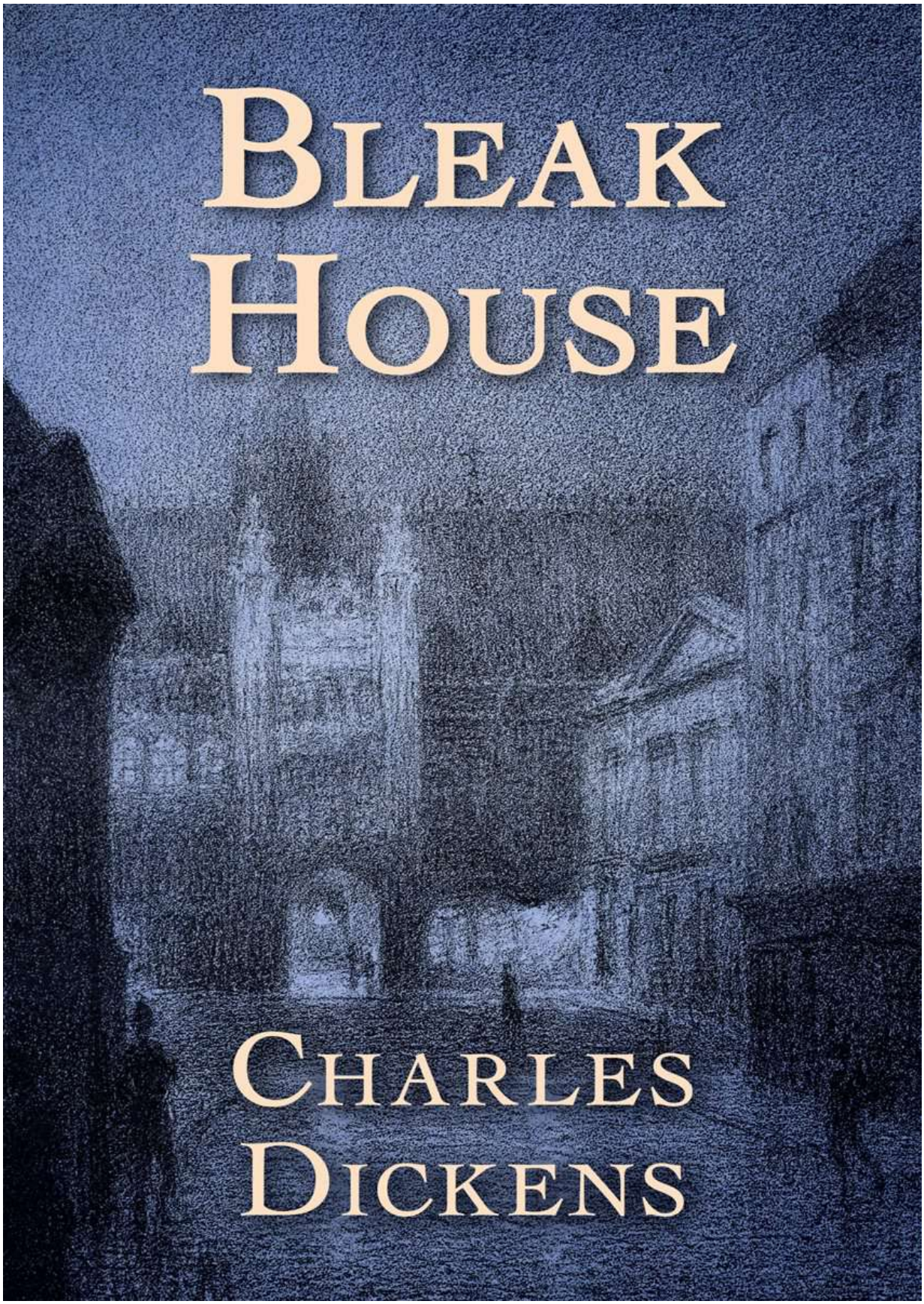
“Glad to part again, Estella? To me, parting is a painful thing. To me, the remembrance of our last parting has been ever mournful and painful.”

“But you said to me,” returned Estella, very earnestly, “‘God bless you, God forgive you!’ And if you could say that to me then, you will not hesitate to say that to me now,—now, when suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but—I hope—into a better shape. Be as considerate and good to me as you were, and tell me we are friends.”

“We are friends,” said I, rising and bending over her, as she rose from the bench.

“And will continue friends apart,” said Estella.

I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.


BLEAK
HOUSE
CHARLES
DICKENS

Bleak House

PREFACE

A CHANCERY JUDGE ONCE had the kindness to inform me, as one of a company of some hundred and fifty men and women not labouring under any suspicions of lunacy, that the Court of Chancery, though the shining subject of much popular prejudice (at which point I thought the judge's eye had a cast in my direction), was almost immaculate. There had been, he admitted, a trivial blemish or so in its rate of progress, but this was exaggerated and had been entirely owing to the "parsimony of the public," which guilty public, it appeared, had been until lately bent in the most determined manner on by no means enlarging the number of Chancery judges appointed—I believe by Richard the Second, but any other king will do as well.

This seemed to me too profound a joke to be inserted in the body of this book or I should have restored it to Conversation Kenge or to Mr. Vholes, with one or other of whom I think it must have originated. In such mouths I might have coupled it with an apt quotation from one of Shakespeare's sonnets:

> "My nature is subdued
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:
> Pity me, then, and wish I were renewed!"

But as it is wholesome that the parsimonious public should know what has been doing, and still is doing, in this connexion, I mention here that everything set forth in these pages concerning the Court of Chancery is substantially true, and within the truth. The case of Gridley is in no essential altered from one of actual occurrence, made public by a disinterested person who was professionally acquainted with the whole of the monstrous wrong from beginning to end. At the present moment (August, 1853) there is a suit before the court which was commenced nearly twenty years ago, in which from thirty to forty counsel have been known to appear at one time, in which costs have been incurred to the amount of seventy thousand pounds, which is A FRIENDLY SUIT, and which is (I am assured) no nearer to

its termination now than when it was begun. There is another well-known suit in Chancery, not yet decided, which was commenced before the close of the last century and in which more than double the amount of seventy thousand pounds has been swallowed up in costs. If I wanted other authorities for Jarndyce and Jarndyce, I could rain them on these pages, to the shame of—a parsimonious public.

There is only one other point on which I offer a word of remark. The possibility of what is called spontaneous combustion has been denied since the death of Mr. Krook; and my good friend Mr. Lewes (quite mistaken, as he soon found, in supposing the thing to have been abandoned by all authorities) published some ingenious letters to me at the time when that event was chronicled, arguing that spontaneous combustion could not possibly be. I have no need to observe that I do not wilfully or negligently mislead my readers and that before I wrote that description I took pains to investigate the subject. There are about thirty cases on record, of which the most famous, that of the Countess Cornelia de Baudi Cesenate, was minutely investigated and described by Giuseppe Bianchini, a prebendary of Verona, otherwise distinguished in letters, who published an account of it at Verona in 1731, which he afterwards republished at Rome. The appearances, beyond all rational doubt, observed in that case are the appearances observed in Mr. Krook's case. The next most famous instance happened at Rheims six years earlier, and the historian in that case is Le Cat, one of the most renowned surgeons produced by France. The subject was a woman, whose husband was ignorantly convicted of having murdered her; but on solemn appeal to a higher court, he was acquitted because it was shown upon the evidence that she had died the death of which this name of spontaneous combustion is given. I do not think it necessary to add to these notable facts, and that general reference to the authorities which will be found at page 30, vol. ii.,[1] the recorded opinions and experiences of distinguished medical professors, French, English, and Scotch, in more modern days, contenting myself with observing that I shall not abandon the facts until there shall have been a considerable spontaneous combustion of the testimony on which human occurrences are usually received.[2]

In Bleak House I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things. I believe I have never had so many readers as in this book. May we meet again!

London
August 1853

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1. Transcriber's note. This referred to a specific page in the printed book. In this Project Gutenberg edition the pertinent information is in chapter XXX, paragraph 90.
2. Another case, very clearly described by a dentist, occurred at the town of Columbus, in the United States of America, quite recently. The subject was a German who kept a liquor-shop and was an inveterate drunkard.

CHAPTER I

In Chancery

LONDON. MICHAELMAS TERM LATELY over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln’s Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another’s umbrellas in a general infection of ill temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little ’prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds.

Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongey fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time—as the

gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation, Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds this day in the sight of heaven and earth.

On such an afternoon, if ever, the Lord High Chancellor ought to be sitting here—as here he is—with a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains, addressed by a large advocate with great whiskers, a little voice, and an interminable brief, and outwardly directing his contemplation to the lantern in the roof, where he can see nothing but fog. On such an afternoon some score of members of the High Court of Chancery bar ought to be—as here they are—mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horsehair warded heads against walls of words and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might. On such an afternoon the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it, ought to be—as are they not?—ranged in a line, in a long matted well (but you might look in vain for truth at the bottom of it) between the registrar's red table and the silk gowns, with bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them. Well may the court be dim, with wasting candles here and there; well may the fog hang heavy in it, as if it would never get out; well may the stained-glass windows lose their colour and admit no light of day into the place; well may the uninitiated from the streets, who peep in through the glass panes in the door, be deterred from entrance by its owlish aspect and by the drawl, languidly echoing to the roof from the padded dais where the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it and where the attendant wigs are all stuck in a fog-bank! This is the Court of Chancery, which has its decaying houses and

its blighted lands in every shire, which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse and its dead in every churchyard, which has its ruined suitor with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance, which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearying out the right, which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope, so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart, that there is not an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, "Suffer any wrong that can be done you rather than come here!"

Who happen to be in the Lord Chancellor's court this murky afternoon besides the Lord Chancellor, the counsel in the cause, two or three counsel who are never in any cause, and the well of solicitors before mentioned? There is the registrar below the judge, in wig and gown; and there are two or three maces, or petty-bags, or privy purses, or whatever they may be, in legal court suits. These are all yawning, for no crumb of amusement ever falls from Jarndyce and Jarndyce (the cause in hand), which was squeezed dry years upon years ago. The short-hand writers, the reporters of the court, and the reporters of the newspapers invariably decamp with the rest of the regulars when Jarndyce and Jarndyce comes on. Their places are a blank. Standing on a seat at the side of the hall, the better to peer into the curtained sanctuary, is a little mad old woman in a squeezed bonnet who is always in court, from its sitting to its rising, and always expecting some incomprehensible judgment to be given in her favour. Some say she really is, or was, a party to a suit, but no one knows for certain because no one cares. She carries some small litter in a reticule which she calls her documents, principally consisting of paper matches and dry lavender. A sallow prisoner has come up, in custody, for the half-dozenth time to make a personal application "to purge himself of his contempt," which, being a solitary surviving executor who has fallen into a state of conglomeration about accounts of which it is not pretended that he had ever any knowledge, he is not at all likely ever to do. In the meantime his prospects in life are ended. Another ruined suitor, who periodically appears from Shropshire and breaks out into efforts to address the Chancellor at the close of the day's business and who can by no means be made to understand that the Chancellor is legally ignorant of his existence after making it desolate for a quarter of a century, plants himself in a good place and keeps an eye on the

judge, ready to call out “My Lord!” in a voice of sonorous complaint on the instant of his rising. A few lawyers’ clerks and others who know this suitor by sight linger on the chance of his furnishing some fun and enlivening the dismal weather a little.

Jarndyce and Jarndyce drones on. This scarecrow of a suit has, in course of time, become so complicated that no man alive knows what it means. The parties to it understand it least, but it has been observed that no two Chancery lawyers can talk about it for five minutes without coming to a total disagreement as to all the premises. Innumerable children have been born into the cause; innumerable young people have married into it; innumerable old people have died out of it. Scores of persons have deliriously found themselves made parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce without knowing how or why; whole families have inherited legendary hatreds with the suit. The little plaintiff or defendant who was promised a new rocking-horse when Jarndyce and Jarndyce should be settled has grown up, possessed himself of a real horse, and trotted away into the other world. Fair wards of court have faded into mothers and grandmothers; a long procession of Chancellors has come in and gone out; the legion of bills in the suit have been transformed into mere bills of mortality; there are not three Jarndyces left upon the earth perhaps since old Tom Jarndyce in despair blew his brains out at a coffee-house in Chancery Lane; but Jarndyce and Jarndyce still drags its dreary length before the court, perennially hopeless.

Jarndyce and Jarndyce has passed into a joke. That is the only good that has ever come of it. It has been death to many, but it is a joke in the profession. Every master in Chancery has had a reference out of it. Every Chancellor was “in it,” for somebody or other, when he was counsel at the bar. Good things have been said about it by blue-nosed, bulbous-shoed old benchers in select port-wine committee after dinner in hall. Articled clerks have been in the habit of fleshing their legal wit upon it. The last Lord Chancellor handled it neatly, when, correcting Mr. Blowers, the eminent silk gown who said that such a thing might happen when the sky rained potatoes, he observed, “or when we get through Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Mr. Blowers”—a pleasantry that particularly tickled the maces, bags, and purses.

How many people out of the suit Jarndyce and Jarndyce has stretched

forth its unwholesome hand to spoil and corrupt would be a very wide question. From the master upon whose impaling files reams of dusty warrants in Jarndyce and Jarndyce have grimly writhed into many shapes, down to the copying-clerk in the Six Clerks' Office who has copied his tens of thousands of Chancery folio-pages under that eternal heading, no man's nature has been made better by it. In trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration, under false pretences of all sorts, there are influences that can never come to good. The very solicitors' boys who have kept the wretched suitors at bay, by protesting time out of mind that Mr. Chizzle, Mizzle, or otherwise was particularly engaged and had appointments until dinner, may have got an extra moral twist and shuffle into themselves out of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The receiver in the cause has acquired a goodly sum of money by it but has acquired too a distrust of his own mother and a contempt for his own kind. Chizzle, Mizzle, and otherwise have lapsed into a habit of vaguely promising themselves that they will look into that outstanding little matter and see what can be done for Drizzle—who was not well used—when Jarndyce and Jarndyce shall be got out of the office. Shirking and sharking in all their many varieties have been sown broadcast by the ill-fated cause; and even those who have contemplated its history from the outermost circle of such evil have been insensibly tempted into a loose way of letting bad things alone to take their own bad course, and a loose belief that if the world go wrong it was in some off-hand manner never meant to go right.

Thus, in the midst of the mud and at the heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

"Mr. Tangle," says the Lord High Chancellor, latterly something restless under the eloquence of that learned gentleman.

"Mlud," says Mr. Tangle. Mr. Tangle knows more of Jarndyce and Jarndyce than anybody. He is famous for it—supposed never to have read anything else since he left school.

"Have you nearly concluded your argument?"

"Mlud, no—variety of points—feel it my duty tsubmit—ludship," is the reply that slides out of Mr. Tangle.

"Several members of the bar are still to be heard, I believe?" says the Chancellor with a slight smile.

Eighteen of Mr. Tangle's learned friends, each armed with a little

summary of eighteen hundred sheets, bob up like eighteen hammers in a pianoforte, make eighteen bows, and drop into their eighteen places of obscurity.

"We will proceed with the hearing on Wednesday fortnight," says the Chancellor. For the question at issue is only a question of costs, a mere bud on the forest tree of the parent suit, and really will come to a settlement one of these days.

The Chancellor rises; the bar rises; the prisoner is brought forward in a hurry; the man from Shropshire cries, "My lord!" Maces, bags, and purses indignantly proclaim silence and frown at the man from Shropshire.

"In reference," proceeds the Chancellor, still on Jarndyce and Jarndyce, "to the young girl—"

"Begludship's pardon—boy," says Mr. Tangle prematurely. "In reference," proceeds the Chancellor with extra distinctness, "to the young girl and boy, the two young people"—Mr. Tangle crushed—"whom I directed to be in attendance to-day and who are now in my private room, I will see them and satisfy myself as to the expediency of making the order for their residing with their uncle."

Mr. Tangle on his legs again. "Begludship's pardon—dead."

"With their"—Chancellor looking through his double eye-glass at the papers on his desk—"grandfather."

"Begludship's pardon—victim of rash action—brains."

Suddenly a very little counsel with a terrific bass voice arises, fully inflated, in the back settlements of the fog, and says, "Will your lordship allow me? I appear for him. He is a cousin, several times removed. I am not at the moment prepared to inform the court in what exact remove he is a cousin, but he IS a cousin."

Leaving this address (delivered like a sepulchral message) ringing in the rafters of the roof, the very little counsel drops, and the fog knows him no more. Everybody looks for him. Nobody can see him.

"I will speak with both the young people," says the Chancellor anew, "and satisfy myself on the subject of their residing with their cousin. I will mention the matter to-morrow morning when I take my seat."

The Chancellor is about to bow to the bar when the prisoner is presented. Nothing can possibly come of the prisoner's conglomeration but his being sent back to prison, which is soon done. The man from Shropshire ventures

another remonstrative “My lord!” but the Chancellor, being aware of him, has dexterously vanished. Everybody else quickly vanishes too. A battery of blue bags is loaded with heavy charges of papers and carried off by clerks; the little mad old woman marches off with her documents; the empty court is locked up. If all the injustice it has committed and all the misery it has caused could only be locked up with it, and the whole burnt away in a great funeral pyre—why so much the better for other parties than the parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce!

CHAPTER II

In Fashion

IT IS BUT A glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery but that we may pass from the one scene to the other, as the crow flies. Both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage: oversleeping Rip Van Winkles who have played at strange games through a deal of thundery weather; sleeping beauties whom the knight will wake one day, when all the stopped spits in the kitchen shall begin to turn prodigiously!

It is not a large world. Relatively even to this world of ours, which has its limits too (as your Highness shall find when you have made the tour of it and are come to the brink of the void beyond), it is a very little speck. There is much good in it; there are many good and true people in it; it has its appointed place. But the evil of it is that it is a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun. It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air.

My Lady Dedlock has returned to her house in town for a few days previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks, after which her movements are uncertain. The fashionable intelligence says so for the comfort of the Parisians, and it knows all fashionable things. To know things otherwise were to be unfashionable. My Lady Dedlock has been down at what she calls, in familiar conversation, her "place" in Lincolnshire. The waters are out in Lincolnshire. An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low-lying ground for half a mile in breadth is a stagnant river with melancholy trees for islands in it and a surface punctured all over, all day long, with falling rain. My Lady Dedlock's place has been extremely dreary. The weather for many a day and night has been so wet that the trees seem wet through, and the soft loppings and prunings of the woodman's axe can make no crash or crackle as they fall. The deer, looking soaked, leave quagmires

where they pass. The shot of a rifle loses its sharpness in the moist air, and its smoke moves in a tardy little cloud towards the green rise, coppice-topped, that makes a background for the falling rain. The view from my Lady Dedlock's own windows is alternately a lead-coloured view and a view in Indian ink. The vases on the stone terrace in the foreground catch the rain all day; and the heavy drops fall—drip, drip, drip—upon the broad flagged pavement, called from old time the Ghost's Walk, all night. On Sundays the little church in the park is mouldy; the oaken pulpit breaks out into a cold sweat; and there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves. My Lady Dedlock (who is childless), looking out in the early twilight from her boudoir at a keeper's lodge and seeing the light of a fire upon the latticed panes, and smoke rising from the chimney, and a child, chased by a woman, running out into the rain to meet the shining figure of a wrapped-up man coming through the gate, has been put quite out of temper. My Lady Dedlock says she has been "bored to death."

Therefore my Lady Dedlock has come away from the place in Lincolnshire and has left it to the rain, and the crows, and the rabbits, and the deer, and the partridges and pheasants. The pictures of the Dedlocks past and gone have seemed to vanish into the damp walls in mere lowness of spirits, as the housekeeper has passed along the old rooms shutting up the shutters. And when they will next come forth again, the fashionable intelligence—which, like the fiend, is omniscient of the past and present, but not the future—cannot yet undertake to say.

Sir Leicester Dedlock is only a baronet, but there is no mightier baronet than he. His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable. He has a general opinion that the world might get on without hills but would be done up without Dedlocks. He would on the whole admit nature to be a good idea (a little low, perhaps, when not enclosed with a park-fence), but an idea dependent for its execution on your great county families. He is a gentleman of strict conscience, disdainful of all littleness and meanness and ready on the shortest notice to die any death you may please to mention rather than give occasion for the least impeachment of his integrity. He is an honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man.

Sir Leicester is twenty years, full measure, older than my Lady. He will never see sixty-five again, nor perhaps sixty-six, nor yet sixty-seven. He has

a twist of the gout now and then and walks a little stiffly. He is of a worthy presence, with his light-grey hair and whiskers, his fine shirt-frill, his pure-white waistcoat, and his blue coat with bright buttons always buttoned. He is ceremonious, stately, most polite on every occasion to my Lady, and holds her personal attractions in the highest estimation. His gallantry to my Lady, which has never changed since he courted her, is the one little touch of romantic fancy in him.

Indeed, he married her for love. A whisper still goes about that she had not even family; howbeit, Sir Leicester had so much family that perhaps he had enough and could dispense with any more. But she had beauty, pride, ambition, insolent resolve, and sense enough to portion out a legion of fine ladies. Wealth and station, added to these, soon floated her upward, and for years now my Lady Dedlock has been at the centre of the fashionable intelligence and at the top of the fashionable tree.

How Alexander wept when he had no more worlds to conquer, everybody knows—or has some reason to know by this time, the matter having been rather frequently mentioned. My Lady Dedlock, having conquered HER world, fell not into the melting, but rather into the freezing, mood. An exhausted composure, a worn-out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction, are the trophies of her victory. She is perfectly well-bred. If she could be translated to heaven to-morrow, she might be expected to ascend without any rapture.

She has beauty still, and if it be not in its heyday, it is not yet in its autumn. She has a fine face—originally of a character that would be rather called very pretty than handsome, but improved into classicality by the acquired expression of her fashionable state. Her figure is elegant and has the effect of being tall. Not that she is so, but that “the most is made,” as the Honourable Bob Stables has frequently asserted upon oath, “of all her points.” The same authority observes that she is perfectly got up and remarks in commendation of her hair especially that she is the best-groomed woman in the whole stud.

With all her perfections on her head, my Lady Dedlock has come up from her place in Lincolnshire (hotly pursued by the fashionable intelligence) to pass a few days at her house in town previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks, after which her movements are uncertain. And at her house in town, upon this

muddy, murky afternoon, presents himself an old-fashioned old gentleman, attorney-at-law and eke solicitor of the High Court of Chancery, who has the honour of acting as legal adviser of the Dedlocks and has as many cast-iron boxes in his office with that name outside as if the present baronet were the coin of the conjuror's trick and were constantly being juggled through the whole set. Across the hall, and up the stairs, and along the passages, and through the rooms, which are very brilliant in the season and very dismal out of it—fairy-land to visit, but a desert to live in—the old gentleman is conducted by a Mercury in powder to my Lady's presence.

The old gentleman is rusty to look at, but is reputed to have made good thrift out of aristocratic marriage settlements and aristocratic wills, and to be very rich. He is surrounded by a mysterious halo of family confidences, of which he is known to be the silent depository. There are noble mausoleums rooted for centuries in retired glades of parks among the growing timber and the fern, which perhaps hold fewer noble secrets than walk abroad among men, shut up in the breast of Mr. Tulkinghorn. He is of what is called the old school—a phrase generally meaning any school that seems never to have been young—and wears knee-breeches tied with ribbons, and gaiters or stockings. One peculiarity of his black clothes and of his black stockings, be they silk or worsted, is that they never shine. Mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light, his dress is like himself. He never converses when not professionally consulted. He is found sometimes, speechless but quite at home, at corners of dinner-tables in great country houses and near doors of drawing-rooms, concerning which the fashionable intelligence is eloquent, where everybody knows him and where half the Peerage stops to say "How do you do, Mr. Tulkinghorn?" He receives these salutations with gravity and buries them along with the rest of his knowledge.

Sir Leicester Dedlock is with my Lady and is happy to see Mr. Tulkinghorn. There is an air of prescription about him which is always agreeable to Sir Leicester; he receives it as a kind of tribute. He likes Mr. Tulkinghorn's dress; there is a kind of tribute in that too. It is eminently respectable, and likewise, in a general way, retainer-like. It expresses, as it were, the steward of the legal mysteries, the butler of the legal cellar, of the Dedlocks.

Has Mr. Tulkinghorn any idea of this himself? It may be so, or it may

not, but there is this remarkable circumstance to be noted in everything associated with my Lady Dedlock as one of a class—as one of the leaders and representatives of her little world. She supposes herself to be an inscrutable Being, quite out of the reach and ken of ordinary mortals—seeing herself in her glass, where indeed she looks so. Yet every dim little star revolving about her, from her maid to the manager of the Italian Opera, knows her weaknesses, prejudices, follies, haughtinesses, and caprices and lives upon as accurate a calculation and as nice a measure of her moral nature as her dressmaker takes of her physical proportions. Is a new dress, a new custom, a new singer, a new dancer, a new form of jewellery, a new dwarf or giant, a new chapel, a new anything, to be set up? There are deferential people in a dozen callings whom my Lady Dedlock suspects of nothing but prostration before her, who can tell you how to manage her as if she were a baby, who do nothing but nurse her all their lives, who, humbly affecting to follow with profound subservience, lead her and her whole troop after them; who, in hooking one, hook all and bear them off as Lemuel Gulliver bore away the stately fleet of the majestic Lilliput. “If you want to address our people, sir,” say Blaze and Sparkle, the jewellers—meaning by our people Lady Dedlock and the rest—“you must remember that you are not dealing with the general public; you must hit our people in their weakest place, and their weakest place is such a place.” “To make this article go down, gentlemen,” say Sheen and Gloss, the mercers, to their friends the manufacturers, “you must come to us, because we know where to have the fashionable people, and we can make it fashionable.” “If you want to get this print upon the tables of my high connexion, sir,” says Mr. Sladdery, the librarian, “or if you want to get this dwarf or giant into the houses of my high connexion, sir, or if you want to secure to this entertainment the patronage of my high connexion, sir, you must leave it, if you please, to me, for I have been accustomed to study the leaders of my high connexion, sir, and I may tell you without vanity that I can turn them round my finger”—in which Mr. Sladdery, who is an honest man, does not exaggerate at all.

Therefore, while Mr. Tulkinghorn may not know what is passing in the Dedlock mind at present, it is very possible that he may.

“My Lady’s cause has been again before the Chancellor, has it, Mr. Tulkinghorn?” says Sir Leicester, giving him his hand.

“Yes. It has been on again to-day,” Mr. Tulkinghorn replies, making one of his quiet bows to my Lady, who is on a sofa near the fire, shading her face with a hand-screen.

“It would be useless to ask,” says my Lady with the dreariness of the place in Lincolnshire still upon her, “whether anything has been done.”

“Nothing that YOU would call anything has been done to-day,” replies Mr. Tulkinghorn.

“Nor ever will be,” says my Lady.

Sir Leicester has no objection to an interminable Chancery suit. It is a slow, expensive, British, constitutional kind of thing. To be sure, he has not a vital interest in the suit in question, her part in which was the only property my Lady brought him; and he has a shadowy impression that for his name—the name of Dedlock—to be in a cause, and not in the title of that cause, is a most ridiculous accident. But he regards the Court of Chancery, even if it should involve an occasional delay of justice and a trifling amount of confusion, as a something devised in conjunction with a variety of other somethings by the perfection of human wisdom for the eternal settlement (humanly speaking) of everything. And he is upon the whole of a fixed opinion that to give the sanction of his countenance to any complaints respecting it would be to encourage some person in the lower classes to rise up somewhere—like Wat Tyler.

“As a few fresh affidavits have been put upon the file,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn, “and as they are short, and as I proceed upon the troublesome principle of begging leave to possess my clients with any new proceedings in a cause”—cautious man Mr. Tulkinghorn, taking no more responsibility than necessary—“and further, as I see you are going to Paris, I have brought them in my pocket.”

(Sir Leicester was going to Paris too, by the by, but the delight of the fashionable intelligence was in his Lady.)

Mr. Tulkinghorn takes out his papers, asks permission to place them on a golden talisman of a table at my Lady’s elbow, puts on his spectacles, and begins to read by the light of a shaded lamp.

“‘In Chancery. Between John Jarndyce—’”

My Lady interrupts, requesting him to miss as many of the formal horrors as he can.

Mr. Tulkinghorn glances over his spectacles and begins again lower

down. My Lady carelessly and scornfully abstracts her attention. Sir Leicester in a great chair looks at the file and appears to have a stately liking for the legal repetitions and prolixities as ranging among the national bulwarks. It happens that the fire is hot where my Lady sits and that the hand-screen is more beautiful than useful, being priceless but small. My Lady, changing her position, sees the papers on the table—looks at them nearer—looks at them nearer still—asks impulsively, “Who copied that?”

Mr. Tulkinghorn stops short, surprised by my Lady’s animation and her unusual tone.

“Is it what you people call law-hand?” she asks, looking full at him in her careless way again and toying with her screen.

“Not quite. Probably”—Mr. Tulkinghorn examines it as he speaks—“the legal character which it has was acquired after the original hand was formed. Why do you ask?”

“Anything to vary this detestable monotony. Oh, go on, do!”

Mr. Tulkinghorn reads again. The heat is greater; my Lady screens her face. Sir Leicester dozes, starts up suddenly, and cries, “Eh? What do you say?”

“I say I am afraid,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn, who had risen hastily, “that Lady Dedlock is ill.”

“Faint,” my Lady murmurs with white lips, “only that; but it is like the faintness of death. Don’t speak to me. Ring, and take me to my room!”

Mr. Tulkinghorn retires into another chamber; bells ring, feet shuffle and patter, silence ensues. Mercury at last begs Mr. Tulkinghorn to return.

“Better now,” quoth Sir Leicester, motioning the lawyer to sit down and read to him alone. “I have been quite alarmed. I never knew my Lady swoon before. But the weather is extremely trying, and she really has been bored to death down at our place in Lincolnshire.”

CHAPTER III

A Progress

I HAVE A GREAT deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever. I always knew that. I can remember, when I was a very little girl indeed, I used to say to my doll when we were alone together, “Now, Dolly, I am not clever, you know very well, and you must be patient with me, like a dear!” And so she used to sit propped up in a great arm-chair, with her beautiful complexion and rosy lips, staring at me—or not so much at me, I think, as at nothing—while I busily stitched away and told her every one of my secrets.

My dear old doll! I was such a shy little thing that I seldom dared to open my lips, and never dared to open my heart, to anybody else. It almost makes me cry to think what a relief it used to be to me when I came home from school of a day to run upstairs to my room and say, “Oh, you dear faithful Dolly, I knew you would be expecting me!” and then to sit down on the floor, leaning on the elbow of her great chair, and tell her all I had noticed since we parted. I had always rather a noticing way—not a quick way, oh, no!—a silent way of noticing what passed before me and thinking I should like to understand it better. I have not by any means a quick understanding. When I love a person very tenderly indeed, it seems to brighten. But even that may be my vanity.

I was brought up, from my earliest remembrance—like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, only I was not charming—by my godmother. At least, I only knew her as such. She was a good, good woman! She went to church three times every Sunday, and to morning prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays, and to lectures whenever there were lectures; and never missed. She was handsome; and if she had ever smiled, would have been (I used to think) like an angel—but she never smiled. She was always grave and strict. She was so very good herself, I thought, that the badness of other people made her frown all her life. I felt so different from her, even making every allowance for the differences between a child and a woman; I felt so

poor, so trifling, and so far off that I never could be unrestrained with her—no, could never even love her as I wished. It made me very sorry to consider how good she was and how unworthy of her I was, and I used ardently to hope that I might have a better heart; and I talked it over very often with the dear old doll, but I never loved my godmother as I ought to have loved her and as I felt I must have loved her if I had been a better girl.

This made me, I dare say, more timid and retiring than I naturally was and cast me upon Dolly as the only friend with whom I felt at ease. But something happened when I was still quite a little thing that helped it very much.

I had never heard my mama spoken of. I had never heard of my papa either, but I felt more interested about my mama. I had never worn a black frock, that I could recollect. I had never been shown my mama's grave. I had never been told where it was. Yet I had never been taught to pray for any relation but my godmother. I had more than once approached this subject of my thoughts with Mrs. Rachael, our only servant, who took my light away when I was in bed (another very good woman, but austere to me), and she had only said, "Esther, good night!" and gone away and left me.

Although there were seven girls at the neighbouring school where I was a day boarder, and although they called me little Esther Summerson, I knew none of them at home. All of them were older than I, to be sure (I was the youngest there by a good deal), but there seemed to be some other separation between us besides that, and besides their being far more clever than I was and knowing much more than I did. One of them in the first week of my going to the school (I remember it very well) invited me home to a little party, to my great joy. But my godmother wrote a stiff letter declining for me, and I never went. I never went out at all.

It was my birthday. There were holidays at school on other birthdays—none on mine. There were rejoicings at home on other birthdays, as I knew from what I heard the girls relate to one another—there were none on mine. My birthday was the most melancholy day at home in the whole year.

I have mentioned that unless my vanity should deceive me (as I know it may, for I may be very vain without suspecting it, though indeed I don't), my comprehension is quickened when my affection is. My disposition is very affectionate, and perhaps I might still feel such a wound if such a

wound could be received more than once with the quickness of that birthday.

Dinner was over, and my godmother and I were sitting at the table before the fire. The clock ticked, the fire clicked; not another sound had been heard in the room or in the house for I don't know how long. I happened to look timidly up from my stitching, across the table at my godmother, and I saw in her face, looking gloomily at me, "It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday, that you had never been born!"

I broke out crying and sobbing, and I said, "Oh, dear godmother, tell me, pray do tell me, did Mama die on my birthday?"

"No," she returned. "Ask me no more, child!"

"Oh, do pray tell me something of her. Do now, at last, dear godmother, if you please! What did I do to her? How did I lose her? Why am I so different from other children, and why is it my fault, dear godmother? No, no, no, don't go away. Oh, speak to me!"

I was in a kind of fright beyond my grief, and I caught hold of her dress and was kneeling to her. She had been saying all the while, "Let me go!" But now she stood still.

Her darkened face had such power over me that it stopped me in the midst of my vehemence. I put up my trembling little hand to clasp hers or to beg her pardon with what earnestness I might, but withdrew it as she looked at me, and laid it on my fluttering heart. She raised me, sat in her chair, and standing me before her, said slowly in a cold, low voice—I see her knitted brow and pointed finger—"Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come—and soon enough—when you will understand this better and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can. I have forgiven her"—but her face did not relent—"the wrong she did to me, and I say no more of it, though it was greater than you will ever know—than any one will ever know but I, the sufferer. For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written. Forget your mother and leave all other people to forget her who will do her unhappy child that greatest kindness. Now, go!"

She checked me, however, as I was about to depart from her—so frozen as I was!—and added this, "Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different

from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart."

I went up to my room, and crept to bed, and laid my doll's cheek against mine wet with tears, and holding that solitary friend upon my bosom, cried myself to sleep. Imperfect as my understanding of my sorrow was, I knew that I had brought no joy at any time to anybody's heart and that I was to no one upon earth what Dolly was to me.

Dear, dear, to think how much time we passed alone together afterwards, and how often I repeated to the doll the story of my birthday and confided to her that I would try as hard as ever I could to repair the fault I had been born with (of which I confessedly felt guilty and yet innocent) and would strive as I grew up to be industrious, contented, and kind-hearted and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could. I hope it is not self-indulgent to shed these tears as I think of it. I am very thankful, I am very cheerful, but I cannot quite help their coming to my eyes.

There! I have wiped them away now and can go on again properly.

I felt the distance between my godmother and myself so much more after the birthday, and felt so sensible of filling a place in her house which ought to have been empty, that I found her more difficult of approach, though I was fervently grateful to her in my heart, than ever. I felt in the same way towards my school companions; I felt in the same way towards Mrs. Rachael, who was a widow; and oh, towards her daughter, of whom she was proud, who came to see her once a fortnight! I was very retired and quiet, and tried to be very diligent.

One sunny afternoon when I had come home from school with my books and portfolio, watching my long shadow at my side, and as I was gliding upstairs to my room as usual, my godmother looked out of the parlour-door and called me back. Sitting with her, I found—which was very unusual indeed—a stranger. A portly, important-looking gentleman, dressed all in black, with a white cravat, large gold watch seals, a pair of gold eye-glasses, and a large seal-ring upon his little finger.

"This," said my godmother in an undertone, "is the child." Then she said in her naturally stern way of speaking, "This is Esther, sir."

The gentleman put up his eye-glasses to look at me and said, "Come here, my dear!" He shook hands with me and asked me to take off my bonnet, looking at me all the while. When I had complied, he said, "Ah!"

and afterwards “Yes!” And then, taking off his eye-glasses and folding them in a red case, and leaning back in his arm-chair, turning the case about in his two hands, he gave my godmother a nod. Upon that, my godmother said, “You may go upstairs, Esther!” And I made him my curtsy and left him.

It must have been two years afterwards, and I was almost fourteen, when one dreadful night my godmother and I sat at the fireside. I was reading aloud, and she was listening. I had come down at nine o’clock as I always did to read the Bible to her, and was reading from St. John how our Saviour stooped down, writing with his finger in the dust, when they brought the sinful woman to him.

“So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself and said unto them, ‘He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her!’”

I was stopped by my godmother’s rising, putting her hand to her head, and crying out in an awful voice from quite another part of the book, “‘Watch ye, therefore, lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!’”

In an instant, while she stood before me repeating these words, she fell down on the floor. I had no need to cry out; her voice had sounded through the house and been heard in the street.

She was laid upon her bed. For more than a week she lay there, little altered outwardly, with her old handsome resolute frown that I so well knew carved upon her face. Many and many a time, in the day and in the night, with my head upon the pillow by her that my whispers might be plainer to her, I kissed her, thanked her, prayed for her, asked her for her blessing and forgiveness, entreated her to give me the least sign that she knew or heard me. No, no, no. Her face was immovable. To the very last, and even afterwards, her frown remained unsoftened.

On the day after my poor good godmother was buried, the gentleman in black with the white neckcloth reappeared. I was sent for by Mrs. Rachael, and found him in the same place, as if he had never gone away.

“My name is Kenge,” he said; “you may remember it, my child; Kenge and Carboy, Lincoln’s Inn.”

I replied that I remembered to have seen him once before.

“Pray be seated—here near me. Don’t distress yourself; it’s of no use. Mrs. Rachael, I needn’t inform you who were acquainted with the late Miss Barbary’s affairs, that her means die with her and that this young lady, now

her aunt is dead—”

“My aunt, sir!”

“It is really of no use carrying on a deception when no object is to be gained by it,” said Mr. Kenge smoothly, “Aunt in fact, though not in law. Don’t distress yourself! Don’t weep! Don’t tremble! Mrs. Rachael, our young friend has no doubt heard of—the—a—Jarndyce and Jarndyce.”

“Never,” said Mrs. Rachael.

“Is it possible,” pursued Mr. Kenge, putting up his eye-glasses, “that our young friend—I BEG you won’t distress yourself!—never heard of Jarndyce and Jarndyce!”

I shook my head, wondering even what it was.

“Not of Jarndyce and Jarndyce?” said Mr. Kenge, looking over his glasses at me and softly turning the case about and about as if he were petting something. “Not of one of the greatest Chancery suits known? Not of Jarndyce and Jarndyce—the—a—in itself a monument of Chancery practice. In which (I would say) every difficulty, every contingency, every masterly fiction, every form of procedure known in that court, is represented over and over again? It is a cause that could not exist out of this free and great country. I should say that the aggregate of costs in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Mrs. Rachael”—I was afraid he addressed himself to her because I appeared inattentive; “amounts at the present hour to from SIX-ty to SEVEN-ty THOUSAND POUNDS!” said Mr. Kenge, leaning back in his chair.

I felt very ignorant, but what could I do? I was so entirely unacquainted with the subject that I understood nothing about it even then.

“And she really never heard of the cause!” said Mr. Kenge. “Surprising!”

“Miss Barbary, sir,” returned Mrs. Rachael, “who is now among the Seraphim—”

“I hope so, I am sure,” said Mr. Kenge politely.

“—Wished Esther only to know what would be serviceable to her. And she knows, from any teaching she has had here, nothing more.”

“Well!” said Mr. Kenge. “Upon the whole, very proper. Now to the point,” addressing me. “Miss Barbary, your sole relation (in fact that is, for I am bound to observe that in law you had none) being deceased and it naturally not being to be expected that Mrs. Rachael—”

“Oh, dear no!” said Mrs. Rachael quickly.

“Quite so,” assented Mr. Kenge; “—that Mrs. Rachael should charge

herself with your maintenance and support (I beg you won't distress yourself), you are in a position to receive the renewal of an offer which I was instructed to make to Miss Barbary some two years ago and which, though rejected then, was understood to be renewable under the lamentable circumstances that have since occurred. Now, if I avow that I represent, in Jarndyce and Jarndyce and otherwise, a highly humane, but at the same time singular, man, shall I compromise myself by any stretch of my professional caution?" said Mr. Kenge, leaning back in his chair again and looking calmly at us both.

He appeared to enjoy beyond everything the sound of his own voice. I couldn't wonder at that, for it was mellow and full and gave great importance to every word he uttered. He listened to himself with obvious satisfaction and sometimes gently beat time to his own music with his head or rounded a sentence with his hand. I was very much impressed by him—even then, before I knew that he formed himself on the model of a great lord who was his client and that he was generally called Conversation Kenge.

"Mr. Jarndyce," he pursued, "being aware of the—I would say, desolate—position of our young friend, offers to place her at a first-rate establishment where her education shall be completed, where her comfort shall be secured, where her reasonable wants shall be anticipated, where she shall be eminently qualified to discharge her duty in that station of life unto which it has pleased—shall I say Providence?—to call her."

My heart was filled so full, both by what he said and by his affecting manner of saying it, that I was not able to speak, though I tried.

"Mr. Jarndyce," he went on, "makes no condition beyond expressing his expectation that our young friend will not at any time remove herself from the establishment in question without his knowledge and concurrence. That she will faithfully apply herself to the acquisition of those accomplishments, upon the exercise of which she will be ultimately dependent. That she will tread in the paths of virtue and honour, and—the—a—so forth."

I was still less able to speak than before.

"Now, what does our young friend say?" proceeded Mr. Kenge. "Take time, take time! I pause for her reply. But take time!"

What the destitute subject of such an offer tried to say, I need not repeat.

What she did say, I could more easily tell, if it were worth the telling. What she felt, and will feel to her dying hour, I could never relate.

This interview took place at Windsor, where I had passed (as far as I knew) my whole life. On that day week, amply provided with all necessaries, I left it, inside the stagecoach, for Reading.

Mrs. Rachael was too good to feel any emotion at parting, but I was not so good, and wept bitterly. I thought that I ought to have known her better after so many years and ought to have made myself enough of a favourite with her to make her sorry then. When she gave me one cold parting kiss upon my forehead, like a thaw-drop from the stone porch—it was a very frosty day—I felt so miserable and self-reproachful that I clung to her and told her it was my fault, I knew, that she could say good-bye so easily!

"No, Esther!" she returned. "It is your misfortune!"

The coach was at the little lawn-gate—we had not come out until we heard the wheels—and thus I left her, with a sorrowful heart. She went in before my boxes were lifted to the coach-roof and shut the door. As long as I could see the house, I looked back at it from the window through my tears. My godmother had left Mrs. Rachael all the little property she possessed; and there was to be a sale; and an old hearth-rug with roses on it, which always seemed to me the first thing in the world I had ever seen, was hanging outside in the frost and snow. A day or two before, I had wrapped the dear old doll in her own shawl and quietly laid her—I am half ashamed to tell it—in the garden-earth under the tree that shaded my old window. I had no companion left but my bird, and him I carried with me in his cage.

When the house was out of sight, I sat, with my bird-cage in the straw at my feet, forward on the low seat to look out of the high window, watching the frosty trees, that were like beautiful pieces of spar, and the fields all smooth and white with last night's snow, and the sun, so red but yielding so little heat, and the ice, dark like metal where the skaters and sliders had brushed the snow away. There was a gentleman in the coach who sat on the opposite seat and looked very large in a quantity of wrappings, but he sat gazing out of the other window and took no notice of me.

I thought of my dead godmother, of the night when I read to her, of her frowning so fixedly and sternly in her bed, of the strange place I was going to, of the people I should find there, and what they would be like, and what they would say to me, when a voice in the coach gave me a terrible start.

It said, “What the de-vil are you crying for?”

I was so frightened that I lost my voice and could only answer in a whisper, “Me, sir?” For of course I knew it must have been the gentleman in the quantity of wrappings, though he was still looking out of his window.

“Yes, you,” he said, turning round.

“I didn’t know I was crying, sir,” I faltered.

“But you are!” said the gentleman. “Look here!” He came quite opposite to me from the other corner of the coach, brushed one of his large furry cuffs across my eyes (but without hurting me), and showed me that it was wet.

“There! Now you know you are,” he said. “Don’t you?”

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“And what are you crying for?” said the gentleman, “Don’t you want to go there?”

“Where, sir?”

“Where? Why, wherever you are going,” said the gentleman.

“I am very glad to go there, sir,” I answered.

“Well, then! Look glad!” said the gentleman.

I thought he was very strange, or at least that what I could see of him was very strange, for he was wrapped up to the chin, and his face was almost hidden in a fur cap with broad fur straps at the side of his head fastened under his chin; but I was composed again, and not afraid of him. So I told him that I thought I must have been crying because of my godmother’s death and because of Mrs. Rachael’s not being sorry to part with me.

“Confound Mrs. Rachael!” said the gentleman. “Let her fly away in a high wind on a broomstick!”

I began to be really afraid of him now and looked at him with the greatest astonishment. But I thought that he had pleasant eyes, although he kept on muttering to himself in an angry manner and calling Mrs. Rachael names.

After a little while he opened his outer wrapper, which appeared to me large enough to wrap up the whole coach, and put his arm down into a deep pocket in the side.

“Now, look here!” he said. “In this paper,” which was nicely folded, “is a piece of the best plum-cake that can be got for money—sugar on the outside

an inch thick, like fat on mutton chops. Here's a little pie (a gem this is, both for size and quality), made in France. And what do you suppose it's made of? Livers of fat geese. There's a pie! Now let's see you eat 'em."

"Thank you, sir," I replied; "thank you very much indeed, but I hope you won't be offended—they are too rich for me."

"Floored again!" said the gentleman, which I didn't at all understand, and threw them both out of window.

He did not speak to me any more until he got out of the coach a little way short of Reading, when he advised me to be a good girl and to be studious, and shook hands with me. I must say I was relieved by his departure. We left him at a milestone. I often walked past it afterwards, and never for a long time without thinking of him and half expecting to meet him. But I never did; and so, as time went on, he passed out of my mind.

When the coach stopped, a very neat lady looked up at the window and said, "Miss Donny."

"No, ma'am, Esther Summerson."

"That is quite right," said the lady, "Miss Donny."

I now understood that she introduced herself by that name, and begged Miss Donny's pardon for my mistake, and pointed out my boxes at her request. Under the direction of a very neat maid, they were put outside a very small green carriage; and then Miss Donny, the maid, and I got inside and were driven away.

"Everything is ready for you, Esther," said Miss Donny, "and the scheme of your pursuits has been arranged in exact accordance with the wishes of your guardian, Mr. Jarndyce."

"Of—did you say, ma'am?"

"Of your guardian, Mr. Jarndyce," said Miss Donny.

I was so bewildered that Miss Donny thought the cold had been too severe for me and lent me her smelling-bottle.

"Do you know my—guardian, Mr. Jarndyce, ma'am?" I asked after a good deal of hesitation.

"Not personally, Esther," said Miss Donny; "merely through his solicitors, Messrs. Kenge and Carboy, of London. A very superior gentleman, Mr. Kenge. Truly eloquent indeed. Some of his periods quite majestic!"

I felt this to be very true but was too confused to attend to it. Our speedy

arrival at our destination, before I had time to recover myself, increased my confusion, and I never shall forget the uncertain and the unreal air of everything at Greenleaf (Miss Donny's house) that afternoon!

But I soon became used to it. I was so adapted to the routine of Greenleaf before long that I seemed to have been there a great while and almost to have dreamed rather than really lived my old life at my godmother's. Nothing could be more precise, exact, and orderly than Greenleaf. There was a time for everything all round the dial of the clock, and everything was done at its appointed moment.

We were twelve boarders, and there were two Miss Donnys, twins. It was understood that I would have to depend, by and by, on my qualifications as a governess, and I was not only instructed in everything that was taught at Greenleaf, but was very soon engaged in helping to instruct others. Although I was treated in every other respect like the rest of the school, this single difference was made in my case from the first. As I began to know more, I taught more, and so in course of time I had plenty to do, which I was very fond of doing because it made the dear girls fond of me. At last, whenever a new pupil came who was a little downcast and unhappy, she was so sure—indeed I don't know why—to make a friend of me that all new-comers were confided to my care. They said I was so gentle, but I am sure THEY were! I often thought of the resolution I had made on my birthday to try to be industrious, contented, and true-hearted and to do some good to some one and win some love if I could; and indeed, indeed, I felt almost ashamed to have done so little and have won so much.

I passed at Greenleaf six happy, quiet years. I never saw in any face there, thank heaven, on my birthday, that it would have been better if I had never been born. When the day came round, it brought me so many tokens of affectionate remembrance that my room was beautiful with them from New Year's Day to Christmas.

In those six years I had never been away except on visits at holiday time in the neighbourhood. After the first six months or so I had taken Miss Donny's advice in reference to the propriety of writing to Mr. Kenge to say that I was happy and grateful, and with her approval I had written such a letter. I had received a formal answer acknowledging its receipt and saying, "We note the contents thereof, which shall be duly communicated to our client." After that I sometimes heard Miss Donny and her sister mention

how regular my accounts were paid, and about twice a year I ventured to write a similar letter. I always received by return of post exactly the same answer in the same round hand, with the signature of Kenge and Carboy in another writing, which I supposed to be Mr. Kenge's.

It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of MY life! But my little body will soon fall into the background now.

Six quiet years (I find I am saying it for the second time) I had passed at Greenleaf, seeing in those around me, as it might be in a looking-glass, every stage of my own growth and change there, when, one November morning, I received this letter. I omit the date.

Old Square, Lincoln's Inn

Madam,
Jarndyce and Jarndyce

Our clt Mr. Jarndyce being abt to rece into his house, under an Order of the Ct of Chy, a Ward of the Ct in this cause, for whom he wishes to secure an elgble compn, directs us to inform you that he will be glad of your serces in the afsd capacity.

We have arrngd for your being forded, carriage free, pr eight o'clock coach from Reading, on Monday morning next, to White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly, London, where one of our clks will be in waiting to convey you to our offe as above.

We are, Madam, Your obedt Servts,

Kenge and Carboy

Miss Esther Summerson

Oh, never, never, never shall I forget the emotion this letter caused in the house! It was so tender in them to care so much for me, it was so gracious in that father who had not forgotten me to have made my orphan way so smooth and easy and to have inclined so many youthful natures towards me, that I could hardly bear it. Not that I would have had them less sorry—I am afraid not; but the pleasure of it, and the pain of it, and the pride and joy of it, and the humble regret of it were so blended that my heart seemed almost

breaking while it was full of rapture.

The letter gave me only five days' notice of my removal. When every minute added to the proofs of love and kindness that were given me in those five days, and when at last the morning came and when they took me through all the rooms that I might see them for the last time, and when some cried, "Esther, dear, say good-bye to me here at my bedside, where you first spoke so kindly to me!" and when others asked me only to write their names, "With Esther's love," and when they all surrounded me with their parting presents and clung to me weeping and cried, "What shall we do when dear, dear Esther's gone!" and when I tried to tell them how forbearing and how good they had all been to me and how I blessed and thanked them every one, what a heart I had!

And when the two Miss Donnys grieved as much to part with me as the least among them, and when the maids said, "Bless you, miss, wherever you go!" and when the ugly lame old gardener, who I thought had hardly noticed me in all those years, came panting after the coach to give me a little nosegay of geraniums and told me I had been the light of his eyes—indeed the old man said so!—what a heart I had then!

And could I help it if with all this, and the coming to the little school, and the unexpected sight of the poor children outside waving their hats and bonnets to me, and of a grey-haired gentleman and lady whose daughter I had helped to teach and at whose house I had visited (who were said to be the proudest people in all that country), caring for nothing but calling out, "Good-bye, Esther. May you be very happy!"—could I help it if I was quite bowed down in the coach by myself and said "Oh, I am so thankful, I am so thankful!" many times over!

But of course I soon considered that I must not take tears where I was going after all that had been done for me. Therefore, of course, I made myself sob less and persuaded myself to be quiet by saying very often, "Esther, now you really must! This WILL NOT do!" I cheered myself up pretty well at last, though I am afraid I was longer about it than I ought to have been; and when I had cooled my eyes with lavender water, it was time to watch for London.

I was quite persuaded that we were there when we were ten miles off, and when we really were there, that we should never get there. However, when we began to jolt upon a stone pavement, and particularly when every

other conveyance seemed to be running into us, and we seemed to be running into every other conveyance, I began to believe that we really were approaching the end of our journey. Very soon afterwards we stopped.

A young gentleman who had inked himself by accident addressed me from the pavement and said, “I am from Kenge and Carboy’s, miss, of Lincoln’s Inn.”

“If you please, sir,” said I.

He was very obliging, and as he handed me into a fly after superintending the removal of my boxes, I asked him whether there was a great fire anywhere? For the streets were so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen.

“Oh, dear no, miss,” he said. “This is a London particular.”

I had never heard of such a thing.

“A fog, miss,” said the young gentleman.

“Oh, indeed!” said I.

We drove slowly through the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world (I thought) and in such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how the people kept their senses, until we passed into sudden quietude under an old gateway and drove on through a silent square until we came to an odd nook in a corner, where there was an entrance up a steep, broad flight of stairs, like an entrance to a church. And there really was a churchyard outside under some cloisters, for I saw the gravestones from the staircase window.

This was Kenge and Carboy’s. The young gentleman showed me through an outer office into Mr. Kenge’s room—there was no one in it—and politely put an arm-chair for me by the fire. He then called my attention to a little looking-glass hanging from a nail on one side of the chimney-piece.

“In case you should wish to look at yourself, miss, after the journey, as you’re going before the Chancellor. Not that it’s requisite, I am sure,” said the young gentleman civilly.

“Going before the Chancellor?” I said, startled for a moment.

“Only a matter of form, miss,” returned the young gentleman. “Mr. Kenge is in court now. He left his compliments, and would you partake of some refreshment”—there were biscuits and a decanter of wine on a small table—“and look over the paper,” which the young gentleman gave me as

he spoke. He then stirred the fire and left me.

Everything was so strange—the stranger from its being night in the daytime, the candles burning with a white flame, and looking raw and cold—that I read the words in the newspaper without knowing what they meant and found myself reading the same words repeatedly. As it was of no use going on in that way, I put the paper down, took a peep at my bonnet in the glass to see if it was neat, and looked at the room, which was not half lighted, and at the shabby, dusty tables, and at the piles of writings, and at a bookcase full of the most inexpressive-looking books that ever had anything to say for themselves. Then I went on, thinking, thinking, thinking; and the fire went on, burning, burning, burning; and the candles went on flickering and guttering, and there were no snuffers—until the young gentleman by and by brought a very dirty pair—for two hours.

At last Mr. Kenge came. HE was not altered, but he was surprised to see how altered I was and appeared quite pleased. "As you are going to be the companion of the young lady who is now in the Chancellor's private room, Miss Summerson," he said, "we thought it well that you should be in attendance also. You will not be discomposed by the Lord Chancellor, I dare say?"

"No, sir," I said, "I don't think I shall," really not seeing on consideration why I should be.

So Mr. Kenge gave me his arm and we went round the corner, under a colonnade, and in at a side door. And so we came, along a passage, into a comfortable sort of room where a young lady and a young gentleman were standing near a great, loud-roaring fire. A screen was interposed between them and it, and they were leaning on the screen, talking.

They both looked up when I came in, and I saw in the young lady, with the fire shining upon her, such a beautiful girl! With such rich golden hair, such soft blue eyes, and such a bright, innocent, trusting face!

"Miss Ada," said Mr. Kenge, "this is Miss Summerson."

She came to meet me with a smile of welcome and her hand extended, but seemed to change her mind in a moment and kissed me. In short, she had such a natural, captivating, winning manner that in a few minutes we were sitting in the window-seat, with the light of the fire upon us, talking together as free and happy as could be.

What a load off my mind! It was so delightful to know that she could

confide in me and like me! It was so good of her, and so encouraging to me!

The young gentleman was her distant cousin, she told me, and his name Richard Carstone. He was a handsome youth with an ingenuous face and a most engaging laugh; and after she had called him up to where we sat, he stood by us, in the light of the fire, talking gaily, like a light-hearted boy. He was very young, not more than nineteen then, if quite so much, but nearly two years older than she was. They were both orphans and (what was very unexpected and curious to me) had never met before that day. Our all three coming together for the first time in such an unusual place was a thing to talk about, and we talked about it; and the fire, which had left off roaring, winked its red eyes at us—as Richard said—like a drowsy old Chancery lion.

We conversed in a low tone because a full-dressed gentleman in a bag wig frequently came in and out, and when he did so, we could hear a drawling sound in the distance, which he said was one of the counsel in our case addressing the Lord Chancellor. He told Mr. Kenge that the Chancellor would be up in five minutes; and presently we heard a bustle and a tread of feet, and Mr. Kenge said that the Court had risen and his lordship was in the next room.

The gentleman in the bag wig opened the door almost directly and requested Mr. Kenge to come in. Upon that, we all went into the next room, Mr. Kenge first, with my darling—it is so natural to me now that I can't help writing it; and there, plainly dressed in black and sitting in an arm-chair at a table near the fire, was his lordship, whose robe, trimmed with beautiful gold lace, was thrown upon another chair. He gave us a searching look as we entered, but his manner was both courtly and kind.

The gentleman in the bag wig laid bundles of papers on his lordship's table, and his lordship silently selected one and turned over the leaves.

"Miss Clare," said the Lord Chancellor. "Miss Ada Clare?"

Mr. Kenge presented her, and his lordship begged her to sit down near him. That he admired her and was interested by her even I could see in a moment. It touched me that the home of such a beautiful young creature should be represented by that dry, official place. The Lord High Chancellor, at his best, appeared so poor a substitute for the love and pride of parents.

"The Jarndyce in question," said the Lord Chancellor, still turning over leaves, "is Jarndyce of Bleak House."

“Jarndyce of Bleak House, my lord,” said Mr. Kenge.

“A dreary name,” said the Lord Chancellor.

“But not a dreary place at present, my lord,” said Mr. Kenge.

“And Bleak House,” said his lordship, “is in—”

“Hertfordshire, my lord.”

“Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House is not married?” said his lordship.

“He is not, my lord,” said Mr. Kenge.

A pause.

“Young Mr. Richard Carstone is present?” said the Lord Chancellor, glancing towards him.

Richard bowed and stepped forward.

“Hum!” said the Lord Chancellor, turning over more leaves.

“Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House, my lord,” Mr. Kenge observed in a low voice, “if I may venture to remind your lordship, provides a suitable companion for—”

“For Mr. Richard Carstone?” I thought (but I am not quite sure) I heard his lordship say in an equally low voice and with a smile.

“For Miss Ada Clare. This is the young lady. Miss Summerson.”

His lordship gave me an indulgent look and acknowledged my curtsy very graciously.

“Miss Summerson is not related to any party in the cause, I think?”

“No, my lord.”

Mr. Kenge leant over before it was quite said and whispered. His lordship, with his eyes upon his papers, listened, nodded twice or thrice, turned over more leaves, and did not look towards me again until we were going away.

Mr. Kenge now retired, and Richard with him, to where I was, near the door, leaving my pet (it is so natural to me that again I can’t help it!) sitting near the Lord Chancellor, with whom his lordship spoke a little part, asking her, as she told me afterwards, whether she had well reflected on the proposed arrangement, and if she thought she would be happy under the roof of Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House, and why she thought so? Presently he rose courteously and released her, and then he spoke for a minute or two with Richard Carstone, not seated, but standing, and altogether with more ease and less ceremony, as if he still knew, though he WAS Lord Chancellor, how to go straight to the candour of a boy.

“Very well!” said his lordship aloud. “I shall make the order. Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House has chosen, so far as I may judge,” and this was when he looked at me, “a very good companion for the young lady, and the arrangement altogether seems the best of which the circumstances admit.”

He dismissed us pleasantly, and we all went out, very much obliged to him for being so affable and polite, by which he had certainly lost no dignity but seemed to us to have gained some.

When we got under the colonnade, Mr. Kenge remembered that he must go back for a moment to ask a question and left us in the fog, with the Lord Chancellor’s carriage and servants waiting for him to come out.

“Well!” said Richard Carstone. “THAT’S over! And where do we go next, Miss Summerson?”

“Don’t you know?” I said.

“Not in the least,” said he.

“And don’t YOU know, my love?” I asked Ada.

“No!” said she. “Don’t you?”

“Not at all!” said I.

We looked at one another, half laughing at our being like the children in the wood, when a curious little old woman in a squeezed bonnet and carrying a reticule came curtsying and smiling up to us with an air of great ceremony.

“Oh!” said she. “The wards in Jarndyce! Ve-ry happy, I am sure, to have the honour! It is a good omen for youth, and hope, and beauty when they find themselves in this place, and don’t know what’s to come of it.”

“Mad!” whispered Richard, not thinking she could hear him.

“Right! Mad, young gentleman,” she returned so quickly that he was quite abashed. “I was a ward myself. I was not mad at that time,” curtsying low and smiling between every little sentence. “I had youth and hope. I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of the three served or saved me. I have the honour to attend court regularly. With my documents. I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. I have discovered that the sixth seal mentioned in the Revelations is the Great Seal. It has been open a long time! Pray accept my blessing.”

As Ada was a little frightened, I said, to humour the poor old lady, that we were much obliged to her.

“Ye-es!” she said mincingly. “I imagine so. And here is Conversation

Kenge. With HIS documents! How does your honourable worship do?”

“Quite well, quite well! Now don’t be troublesome, that’s a good soul!” said Mr. Kenge, leading the way back.

“By no means,” said the poor old lady, keeping up with Ada and me. “Anything but troublesome. I shall confer estates on both—which is not being troublesome, I trust? I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. This is a good omen for you. Accept my blessing!”

She stopped at the bottom of the steep, broad flight of stairs; but we looked back as we went up, and she was still there, saying, still with a curtsy and a smile between every little sentence, “Youth. And hope. And beauty. And Chancery. And Conversation Kenge! Ha! Pray accept my blessing!”

CHAPTER IV

Telescopic Philanthropy

WE WERE TO PASS the night, Mr. Kenge told us when we arrived in his room, at Mrs. Jellyby's; and then he turned to me and said he took it for granted I knew who Mrs. Jellyby was.

"I really don't, sir," I returned. "Perhaps Mr. Carstone—or Miss Clare —"

But no, they knew nothing whatever about Mrs. Jellyby. "In-deed! Mrs. Jellyby," said Mr. Kenge, standing with his back to the fire and casting his eyes over the dusty hearth-rug as if it were Mrs. Jellyby's biography, "is a lady of very remarkable strength of character who devotes herself entirely to the public. She has devoted herself to an extensive variety of public subjects at various times and is at present (until something else attracts her) devoted to the subject of Africa, with a view to the general cultivation of the coffee berry—AND the natives—and the happy settlement, on the banks of the African rivers, of our superabundant home population. Mr. Jarndyce, who is desirous to aid any work that is considered likely to be a good work and who is much sought after by philanthropists, has, I believe, a very high opinion of Mrs. Jellyby."

Mr. Kenge, adjusting his cravat, then looked at us.

"And Mr. Jellyby, sir?" suggested Richard.

"Ah! Mr. Jellyby," said Mr. Kenge, "is—a—I don't know that I can describe him to you better than by saying that he is the husband of Mrs. Jellyby."

"A nonentity, sir?" said Richard with a droll look.

"I don't say that," returned Mr. Kenge gravely. "I can't say that, indeed, for I know nothing whatever OF Mr. Jellyby. I never, to my knowledge, had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Jellyby. He may be a very superior man, but he is, so to speak, merged—merged—in the more shining qualities of his wife." Mr. Kenge proceeded to tell us that as the road to Bleak House would have been very long, dark, and tedious on such an evening, and as

we had been travelling already, Mr. Jarndyce had himself proposed this arrangement. A carriage would be at Mrs. Jellyby's to convey us out of town early in the forenoon of to-morrow.

He then rang a little bell, and the young gentleman came in. Addressing him by the name of Guppy, Mr. Kenge inquired whether Miss Summerson's boxes and the rest of the baggage had been "sent round." Mr. Guppy said yes, they had been sent round, and a coach was waiting to take us round too as soon as we pleased.

"Then it only remains," said Mr. Kenge, shaking hands with us, "for me to express my lively satisfaction in (good day, Miss Clare!) the arrangement this day concluded and my (GOOD-bye to you, Miss Summerson!) lively hope that it will conduce to the happiness, the (glad to have had the honour of making your acquaintance, Mr. Carstone!) welfare, the advantage in all points of view, of all concerned! Guppy, see the party safely there."

"Where IS 'there,' Mr. Guppy?" said Richard as we went downstairs.

"No distance," said Mr. Guppy; "round in Thavies Inn, you know."

"I can't say I know where it is, for I come from Winchester and am strange in London."

"Only round the corner," said Mr. Guppy. "We just twist up Chancery Lane, and cut along Holborn, and there we are in four minutes' time, as near as a toucher. This is about a London particular NOW, ain't it, miss?" He seemed quite delighted with it on my account.

"The fog is very dense indeed!" said I.

"Not that it affects you, though, I'm sure," said Mr. Guppy, putting up the steps. "On the contrary, it seems to do you good, miss, judging from your appearance."

I knew he meant well in paying me this compliment, so I laughed at myself for blushing at it when he had shut the door and got upon the box; and we all three laughed and chatted about our inexperience and the strangeness of London until we turned up under an archway to our destination—a narrow street of high houses like an oblong cistern to hold the fog. There was a confused little crowd of people, principally children, gathered about the house at which we stopped, which had a tarnished brass plate on the door with the inscription JELLYBY.

"Don't be frightened!" said Mr. Guppy, looking in at the coach-window. "One of the young Jellybys been and got his head through the area

railings!”

“Oh, poor child,” said I; “let me out, if you please!”

“Pray be careful of yourself, miss. The young Jellybys are always up to something,” said Mr. Guppy.

I made my way to the poor child, who was one of the dirtiest little unfortunates I ever saw, and found him very hot and frightened and crying loudly, fixed by the neck between two iron railings, while a milkman and a beadle, with the kindest intentions possible, were endeavouring to drag him back by the legs, under a general impression that his skull was compressible by those means. As I found (after pacifying him) that he was a little boy with a naturally large head, I thought that perhaps where his head could go, his body could follow, and mentioned that the best mode of extrication might be to push him forward. This was so favourably received by the milkman and beadle that he would immediately have been pushed into the area if I had not held his pinafore while Richard and Mr. Guppy ran down through the kitchen to catch him when he should be released. At last he was happily got down without any accident, and then he began to beat Mr. Guppy with a hoop-stick in quite a frantic manner.

Nobody had appeared belonging to the house except a person in pattens, who had been poking at the child from below with a broom; I don’t know with what object, and I don’t think she did. I therefore supposed that Mrs. Jellyby was not at home, and was quite surprised when the person appeared in the passage without the pattens, and going up to the back room on the first floor before Ada and me, announced us as, “Them two young ladies, Missis Jellyby!” We passed several more children on the way up, whom it was difficult to avoid treading on in the dark; and as we came into Mrs. Jellyby’s presence, one of the poor little things fell downstairs—down a whole flight (as it sounded to me), with a great noise.

Mrs. Jellyby, whose face reflected none of the uneasiness which we could not help showing in our own faces as the dear child’s head recorded its passage with a bump on every stair—Richard afterwards said he counted seven, besides one for the landing—received us with perfect equanimity. She was a pretty, very diminutive, plump woman of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if—I am quoting Richard again—they could see nothing nearer than Africa!

“I am very glad indeed,” said Mrs. Jellyby in an agreeable voice, “to have the pleasure of receiving you. I have a great respect for Mr. Jarndyce, and no one in whom he is interested can be an object of indifference to me.”

We expressed our acknowledgments and sat down behind the door, where there was a lame invalid of a sofa. Mrs. Jellyby had very good hair but was too much occupied with her African duties to brush it. The shawl in which she had been loosely muffled dropped onto her chair when she advanced to us; and as she turned to resume her seat, we could not help noticing that her dress didn’t nearly meet up the back and that the open space was railed across with a lattice-work of stay-lace—like a summer-house.

The room, which was strewn with papers and nearly filled by a great writing-table covered with similar litter, was, I must say, not only very untidy but very dirty. We were obliged to take notice of that with our sense of sight, even while, with our sense of hearing, we followed the poor child who had tumbled downstairs: I think into the back kitchen, where somebody seemed to stifle him.

But what principally struck us was a jaded and unhealthy-looking though by no means plain girl at the writing-table, who sat biting the feather of her pen and staring at us. I suppose nobody ever was in such a state of ink. And from her tumbled hair to her pretty feet, which were disfigured with frayed and broken satin slippers trodden down at heel, she really seemed to have no article of dress upon her, from a pin upwards, that was in its proper condition or its right place.

“You find me, my dears,” said Mrs. Jellyby, snuffing the two great office candles in tin candlesticks, which made the room taste strongly of hot tallow (the fire had gone out, and there was nothing in the grate but ashes, a bundle of wood, and a poker), “you find me, my dears, as usual, very busy; but that you will excuse. The African project at present employs my whole time. It involves me in correspondence with public bodies and with private individuals anxious for the welfare of their species all over the country. I am happy to say it is advancing. We hope by this time next year to have from a hundred and fifty to two hundred healthy families cultivating coffee and educating the natives of Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger.”

As Ada said nothing, but looked at me, I said it must be very gratifying.

“It IS gratifying,” said Mrs. Jellyby. “It involves the devotion of all my energies, such as they are; but that is nothing, so that it succeeds; and I am more confident of success every day. Do you know, Miss Summerson, I almost wonder that YOU never turned your thoughts to Africa.”

This application of the subject was really so unexpected to me that I was quite at a loss how to receive it. I hinted that the climate—

“The finest climate in the world!” said Mrs. Jellyby.

“Indeed, ma’am?”

“Certainly. With precaution,” said Mrs. Jellyby. “You may go into Holborn, without precaution, and be run over. You may go into Holborn, with precaution, and never be run over. Just so with Africa.”

I said, “No doubt.” I meant as to Holborn.

“If you would like,” said Mrs. Jellyby, putting a number of papers towards us, “to look over some remarks on that head, and on the general subject, which have been extensively circulated, while I finish a letter I am now dictating to my eldest daughter, who is my amanuensis—”

The girl at the table left off biting her pen and made a return to our recognition, which was half bashful and half sulky.

“—I shall then have finished for the present,” proceeded Mrs. Jellyby with a sweet smile, “though my work is never done. Where are you, Caddy?”

“‘Presents her compliments to Mr. Swallow, and begs—’” said Caddy.

“‘And begs,’” said Mrs. Jellyby, dictating, “‘to inform him, in reference to his letter of inquiry on the African project—’ No, Peepy! Not on my account!”

Peepy (so self-named) was the unfortunate child who had fallen downstairs, who now interrupted the correspondence by presenting himself, with a strip of plaster on his forehead, to exhibit his wounded knees, in which Ada and I did not know which to pity most—the bruises or the dirt. Mrs. Jellyby merely added, with the serene composure with which she said everything, “Go along, you naughty Peepy!” and fixed her fine eyes on Africa again.

However, as she at once proceeded with her dictation, and as I interrupted nothing by doing it, I ventured quietly to stop poor Peepy as he was going out and to take him up to nurse. He looked very much astonished at it and at Ada’s kissing him, but soon fell fast asleep in my arms, sobbing

at longer and longer intervals, until he was quiet. I was so occupied with Peepy that I lost the letter in detail, though I derived such a general impression from it of the momentous importance of Africa, and the utter insignificance of all other places and things, that I felt quite ashamed to have thought so little about it.

"Six o'clock!" said Mrs. Jellyby. "And our dinner hour is nominally (for we dine at all hours) five! Caddy, show Miss Clare and Miss Summerson their rooms. You will like to make some change, perhaps? You will excuse me, I know, being so much occupied. Oh, that very bad child! Pray put him down, Miss Summerson!"

I begged permission to retain him, truly saying that he was not at all troublesome, and carried him upstairs and laid him on my bed. Ada and I had two upper rooms with a door of communication between. They were excessively bare and disorderly, and the curtain to my window was fastened up with a fork.

"You would like some hot water, wouldn't you?" said Miss Jellyby, looking round for a jug with a handle to it, but looking in vain.

"If it is not being troublesome," said we.

"Oh, it's not the trouble," returned Miss Jellyby; "the question is, if there IS any."

The evening was so very cold and the rooms had such a marshy smell that I must confess it was a little miserable, and Ada was half crying. We soon laughed, however, and were busily unpacking when Miss Jellyby came back to say that she was sorry there was no hot water, but they couldn't find the kettle, and the boiler was out of order.

We begged her not to mention it and made all the haste we could to get down to the fire again. But all the little children had come up to the landing outside to look at the phenomenon of Peepy lying on my bed, and our attention was distracted by the constant apparition of noses and fingers in situations of danger between the hinges of the doors. It was impossible to shut the door of either room, for my lock, with no knob to it, looked as if it wanted to be wound up; and though the handle of Ada's went round and round with the greatest smoothness, it was attended with no effect whatever on the door. Therefore I proposed to the children that they should come in and be very good at my table, and I would tell them the story of Little Red Riding Hood while I dressed; which they did, and were as quiet as mice,

including Peepy, who awoke opportunely before the appearance of the wolf.

When we went downstairs we found a mug with “A Present from Tunbridge Wells” on it lighted up in the staircase window with a floating wick, and a young woman, with a swelled face bound up in a flannel bandage blowing the fire of the drawing-room (now connected by an open door with Mrs. Jellyby’s room) and choking dreadfully. It smoked to that degree, in short, that we all sat coughing and crying with the windows open for half an hour, during which Mrs. Jellyby, with the same sweetness of temper, directed letters about Africa. Her being so employed was, I must say, a great relief to me, for Richard told us that he had washed his hands in a pie-dish and that they had found the kettle on his dressing-table, and he made Ada laugh so that they made me laugh in the most ridiculous manner.

Soon after seven o’clock we went down to dinner, carefully, by Mrs. Jellyby’s advice, for the stair-carpets, besides being very deficient in stair-wires, were so torn as to be absolute traps. We had a fine cod-fish, a piece of roast beef, a dish of cutlets, and a pudding; an excellent dinner, if it had had any cooking to speak of, but it was almost raw. The young woman with the flannel bandage waited, and dropped everything on the table wherever it happened to go, and never moved it again until she put it on the stairs. The person I had seen in pattens, who I suppose to have been the cook, frequently came and skirmished with her at the door, and there appeared to be ill will between them.

All through dinner—which was long, in consequence of such accidents as the dish of potatoes being mislaid in the coal skuttle and the handle of the corkscrew coming off and striking the young woman in the chin—Mrs. Jellyby preserved the evenness of her disposition. She told us a great deal that was interesting about Borrioboola-Gha and the natives, and received so many letters that Richard, who sat by her, saw four envelopes in the gravy at once. Some of the letters were proceedings of ladies’ committees or resolutions of ladies’ meetings, which she read to us; others were applications from people excited in various ways about the cultivation of coffee, and natives; others required answers, and these she sent her eldest daughter from the table three or four times to write. She was full of business and undoubtedly was, as she had told us, devoted to the cause.

I was a little curious to know who a mild bald gentleman in spectacles was, who dropped into a vacant chair (there was no top or bottom in

particular) after the fish was taken away and seemed passively to submit himself to Borrioboola-Gha but not to be actively interested in that settlement. As he never spoke a word, he might have been a native but for his complexion. It was not until we left the table and he remained alone with Richard that the possibility of his being Mr. Jellyby ever entered my head. But he WAS Mr. Jellyby; and a loquacious young man called Mr. Quale, with large shining knobs for temples and his hair all brushed to the back of his head, who came in the evening, and told Ada he was a philanthropist, also informed her that he called the matrimonial alliance of Mrs. Jellyby with Mr. Jellyby the union of mind and matter.

This young man, besides having a great deal to say for himself about Africa and a project of his for teaching the coffee colonists to teach the natives to turn piano-forte legs and establish an export trade, delighted in drawing Mrs. Jellyby out by saying, “I believe now, Mrs. Jellyby, you have received as many as from one hundred and fifty to two hundred letters respecting Africa in a single day, have you not?” or, “If my memory does not deceive me, Mrs. Jellyby, you once mentioned that you had sent off five thousand circulars from one post-office at one time?”—always repeating Mrs. Jellyby’s answer to us like an interpreter. During the whole evening, Mr. Jellyby sat in a corner with his head against the wall as if he were subject to low spirits. It seemed that he had several times opened his mouth when alone with Richard after dinner, as if he had something on his mind, but had always shut it again, to Richard’s extreme confusion, without saying anything.

Mrs. Jellyby, sitting in quite a nest of waste paper, drank coffee all the evening and dictated at intervals to her eldest daughter. She also held a discussion with Mr. Quale, of which the subject seemed to be—if I understood it—the brotherhood of humanity, and gave utterance to some beautiful sentiments. I was not so attentive an auditor as I might have wished to be, however, for Peepy and the other children came flocking about Ada and me in a corner of the drawing-room to ask for another story; so we sat down among them and told them in whispers “Puss in Boots” and I don’t know what else until Mrs. Jellyby, accidentally remembering them, sent them to bed. As Peepy cried for me to take him to bed, I carried him upstairs, where the young woman with the flannel bandage charged into the midst of the little family like a dragon and overturned them into cribs.

After that I occupied myself in making our room a little tidy and in coaxing a very cross fire that had been lighted to burn, which at last it did, quite brightly. On my return downstairs, I felt that Mrs. Jellyby looked down upon me rather for being so frivolous, and I was sorry for it, though at the same time I knew that I had no higher pretensions.

It was nearly midnight before we found an opportunity of going to bed, and even then we left Mrs. Jellyby among her papers drinking coffee and Miss Jellyby biting the feather of her pen.

"What a strange house!" said Ada when we got upstairs. "How curious of my cousin Jarndyce to send us here!"

"My love," said I, "it quite confuses me. I want to understand it, and I can't understand it at all."

"What?" asked Ada with her pretty smile.

"All this, my dear," said I. "It MUST be very good of Mrs. Jellyby to take such pains about a scheme for the benefit of natives—and yet—Peepy and the housekeeping!"

Ada laughed and put her arm about my neck as I stood looking at the fire, and told me I was a quiet, dear, good creature and had won her heart. "You are so thoughtful, Esther," she said, "and yet so cheerful! And you do so much, so unpretendingly! You would make a home out of even this house."

My simple darling! She was quite unconscious that she only praised herself and that it was in the goodness of her own heart that she made so much of me!

"May I ask you a question?" said I when we had sat before the fire a little while.

"Five hundred," said Ada.

"Your cousin, Mr. Jarndyce. I owe so much to him. Would you mind describing him to me?"

Shaking her golden hair, Ada turned her eyes upon me with such laughing wonder that I was full of wonder too, partly at her beauty, partly at her surprise.

"Esther!" she cried.

"My dear!"

"You want a description of my cousin Jarndyce?"

"My dear, I never saw him."

“And I never saw him!” returned Ada.

Well, to be sure!

No, she had never seen him. Young as she was when her mama died, she remembered how the tears would come into her eyes when she spoke of him and of the noble generosity of his character, which she had said was to be trusted above all earthly things; and Ada trusted it. Her cousin Jarndyce had written to her a few months ago—“a plain, honest letter,” Ada said—proposing the arrangement we were now to enter on and telling her that “in time it might heal some of the wounds made by the miserable Chancery suit.” She had replied, gratefully accepting his proposal. Richard had received a similar letter and had made a similar response. He HAD seen Mr. Jarndyce once, but only once, five years ago, at Winchester school. He had told Ada, when they were leaning on the screen before the fire where I found them, that he recollected him as “a bluff, rosy fellow.” This was the utmost description Ada could give me.

It set me thinking so that when Ada was asleep, I still remained before the fire, wondering and wondering about Bleak House, and wondering and wondering that yesterday morning should seem so long ago. I don’t know where my thoughts had wandered when they were recalled by a tap at the door.

I opened it softly and found Miss Jellyby shivering there with a broken candle in a broken candlestick in one hand and an egg-cup in the other.

“Good night!” she said very sulkily.

“Good night!” said I.

“May I come in?” she shortly and unexpectedly asked me in the same sulky way.

“Certainly,” said I. “Don’t wake Miss Clare.”

She would not sit down, but stood by the fire dipping her inky middle finger in the egg-cup, which contained vinegar, and smearing it over the ink stains on her face, frowning the whole time and looking very gloomy.

“I wish Africa was dead!” she said on a sudden.

I was going to remonstrate.

“I do!” she said “Don’t talk to me, Miss Summerson. I hate it and detest it. It’s a beast!”

I told her she was tired, and I was sorry. I put my hand upon her head, and touched her forehead, and said it was hot now but would be cool to-

morrow. She still stood pouting and frowning at me, but presently put down her egg-cup and turned softly towards the bed where Ada lay.

"She is very pretty!" she said with the same knitted brow and in the same uncivil manner.

I assented with a smile.

"An orphan. Ain't she?"

"Yes."

"But knows a quantity, I suppose? Can dance, and play music, and sing? She can talk French, I suppose, and do geography, and globes, and needlework, and everything?"

"No doubt," said I.

"I can't," she returned. "I can't do anything hardly, except write. I'm always writing for Ma. I wonder you two were not ashamed of yourselves to come in this afternoon and see me able to do nothing else. It was like your ill nature. Yet you think yourselves very fine, I dare say!"

I could see that the poor girl was near crying, and I resumed my chair without speaking and looked at her (I hope) as mildly as I felt towards her.

"It's disgraceful," she said. "You know it is. The whole house is disgraceful. The children are disgraceful. I'M disgraceful. Pa's miserable, and no wonder! Priscilla drinks—she's always drinking. It's a great shame and a great story of you if you say you didn't smell her to-day. It was as bad as a public-house, waiting at dinner; you know it was!"

"My dear, I don't know it," said I.

"You do," she said very shortly. "You shan't say you don't. You do!"

"Oh, my dear!" said I. "If you won't let me speak—"

"You're speaking now. You know you are. Don't tell stories, Miss Summerson."

"My dear," said I, "as long as you won't hear me out—"

"I don't want to hear you out."

"Oh, yes, I think you do," said I, "because that would be so very unreasonable. I did not know what you tell me because the servant did not come near me at dinner; but I don't doubt what you tell me, and I am sorry to hear it."

"You needn't make a merit of that," said she.

"No, my dear," said I. "That would be very foolish."

She was still standing by the bed, and now stooped down (but still with

the same discontented face) and kissed Ada. That done, she came softly back and stood by the side of my chair. Her bosom was heaving in a distressful manner that I greatly pitied, but I thought it better not to speak.

"I wish I was dead!" she broke out. "I wish we were all dead. It would be a great deal better for us."

In a moment afterwards, she knelt on the ground at my side, hid her face in my dress, passionately begged my pardon, and wept. I comforted her and would have raised her, but she cried no, no; she wanted to stay there!

"You used to teach girls," she said, "If you could only have taught me, I could have learnt from you! I am so very miserable, and I like you so much!"

I could not persuade her to sit by me or to do anything but move a ragged stool to where she was kneeling, and take that, and still hold my dress in the same manner. By degrees the poor tired girl fell asleep, and then I contrived to raise her head so that it should rest on my lap, and to cover us both with shawls. The fire went out, and all night long she slumbered thus before the ashy grate. At first I was painfully awake and vainly tried to lose myself, with my eyes closed, among the scenes of the day. At length, by slow degrees, they became indistinct and mingled. I began to lose the identity of the sleeper resting on me. Now it was Ada, now one of my old Reading friends from whom I could not believe I had so recently parted. Now it was the little mad woman worn out with curtsying and smiling, now some one in authority at Bleak House. Lastly, it was no one, and I was no one.

The purblind day was feebly struggling with the fog when I opened my eyes to encounter those of a dirty-faced little spectre fixed upon me. Peepy had scaled his crib, and crept down in his bed-gown and cap, and was so cold that his teeth were chattering as if he had cut them all.

CHAPTER V

A Morning Adventure

ALTHOUGH THE MORNING WAS raw, and although the fog still seemed heavy—I say seemed, for the windows were so encrusted with dirt that they would have made midsummer sunshine dim—I was sufficiently forewarned of the discomfort within doors at that early hour and sufficiently curious about London to think it a good idea on the part of Miss Jellyby when she proposed that we should go out for a walk.

"Ma won't be down for ever so long," she said, "and then it's a chance if breakfast's ready for an hour afterwards, they dawdle so. As to Pa, he gets what he can and goes to the office. He never has what you would call a regular breakfast. Priscilla leaves him out the loaf and some milk, when there is any, overnight. Sometimes there isn't any milk, and sometimes the cat drinks it. But I'm afraid you must be tired, Miss Summerson, and perhaps you would rather go to bed."

"I am not at all tired, my dear," said I, "and would much prefer to go out."

"If you're sure you would," returned Miss Jellyby, "I'll get my things on."

Ada said she would go too, and was soon astir. I made a proposal to Peepy, in default of being able to do anything better for him, that he should let me wash him and afterwards lay him down on my bed again. To this he submitted with the best grace possible, staring at me during the whole operation as if he never had been, and never could again be, so astonished in his life—looking very miserable also, certainly, but making no complaint, and going snugly to sleep as soon as it was over. At first I was in two minds about taking such a liberty, but I soon reflected that nobody in the house was likely to notice it.

What with the bustle of dispatching Peepy and the bustle of getting myself ready and helping Ada, I was soon quite in a glow. We found Miss Jellyby trying to warm herself at the fire in the writing-room, which

Priscilla was then lighting with a smutty parlour candlestick, throwing the candle in to make it burn better. Everything was just as we had left it last night and was evidently intended to remain so. Below-stairs the dinner-cloth had not been taken away, but had been left ready for breakfast. Crumbs, dust, and waste-paper were all over the house. Some pewter pots and a milk-can hung on the area railings; the door stood open; and we met the cook round the corner coming out of a public-house, wiping her mouth. She mentioned, as she passed us, that she had been to see what o'clock it was.

But before we met the cook, we met Richard, who was dancing up and down Thavies Inn to warm his feet. He was agreeably surprised to see us stirring so soon and said he would gladly share our walk. So he took care of Ada, and Miss Jellyby and I went first. I may mention that Miss Jellyby had relapsed into her sulky manner and that I really should not have thought she liked me much unless she had told me so.

"Where would you wish to go?" she asked.

"Anywhere, my dear," I replied.

"Anywhere's nowhere," said Miss Jellyby, stopping perversely.

"Let us go somewhere at any rate," said I.

She then walked me on very fast.

"I don't care!" she said. "Now, you are my witness, Miss Summerson, I say I don't care—but if he was to come to our house with his great, shining, lumpy forehead night after night till he was as old as Methuselah, I wouldn't have anything to say to him. Such ASSES as he and Ma make of themselves!"

"My dear!" I remonstrated, in allusion to the epithet and the vigorous emphasis Miss Jellyby set upon it. "Your duty as a child—"

"Oh! Don't talk of duty as a child, Miss Summerson; where's Ma's duty as a parent? All made over to the public and Africa, I suppose! Then let the public and Africa show duty as a child; it's much more their affair than mine. You are shocked, I dare say! Very well, so am I shocked too; so we are both shocked, and there's an end of it!"

She walked me on faster yet.

"But for all that, I say again, he may come, and come, and come, and I won't have anything to say to him. I can't bear him. If there's any stuff in the world that I hate and detest, it's the stuff he and Ma talk. I wonder the

very paving-stones opposite our house can have the patience to stay there and be a witness of such inconsistencies and contradictions as all that sounding nonsense, and Ma's management!"

I could not but understand her to refer to Mr. Quale, the young gentleman who had appeared after dinner yesterday. I was saved the disagreeable necessity of pursuing the subject by Richard and Ada coming up at a round pace, laughing and asking us if we meant to run a race. Thus interrupted, Miss Jellyby became silent and walked moodily on at my side while I admired the long successions and varieties of streets, the quantity of people already going to and fro, the number of vehicles passing and repassing, the busy preparations in the setting forth of shop windows and the sweeping out of shops, and the extraordinary creatures in rags secretly groping among the swept-out rubbish for pins and other refuse.

"So, cousin," said the cheerful voice of Richard to Ada behind me. "We are never to get out of Chancery! We have come by another way to our place of meeting yesterday, and—by the Great Seal, here's the old lady again!"

Truly, there she was, immediately in front of us, curtsying, and smiling, and saying with her yesterday's air of patronage, "The wards in Jarndyce! Ve-ry happy, I am sure!"

"You are out early, ma'am," said I as she curtsied to me.

"Ye-es! I usually walk here early. Before the court sits. It's retired. I collect my thoughts here for the business of the day," said the old lady mincingly. "The business of the day requires a great deal of thought. Chancery justice is so ve-ry difficult to follow."

"Who's this, Miss Summerson?" whispered Miss Jellyby, drawing my arm tighter through her own.

The little old lady's hearing was remarkably quick. She answered for herself directly.

"A suitor, my child. At your service. I have the honour to attend court regularly. With my documents. Have I the pleasure of addressing another of the youthful parties in Jarndyce?" said the old lady, recovering herself, with her head on one side, from a very low curtsy.

Richard, anxious to atone for his thoughtlessness of yesterday, good-naturedly explained that Miss Jellyby was not connected with the suit.

"Ha!" said the old lady. "She does not expect a judgment? She will still

grow old. But not so old. Oh, dear, no! This is the garden of Lincoln's Inn. I call it my garden. It is quite a bower in the summer-time. Where the birds sing melodiously. I pass the greater part of the long vacation here. In contemplation. You find the long vacation exceedingly long, don't you?"

We said yes, as she seemed to expect us to say so.

"When the leaves are falling from the trees and there are no more flowers in bloom to make up into nosegays for the Lord Chancellor's court," said the old lady, "the vacation is fulfilled and the sixth seal, mentioned in the Revelations, again prevails. Pray come and see my lodging. It will be a good omen for me. Youth, and hope, and beauty are very seldom there. It is a long, long time since I had a visit from either."

She had taken my hand, and leading me and Miss Jellyby away, beckoned Richard and Ada to come too. I did not know how to excuse myself and looked to Richard for aid. As he was half amused and half curious and all in doubt how to get rid of the old lady without offence, she continued to lead us away, and he and Ada continued to follow, our strange conductress informing us all the time, with much smiling condescension, that she lived close by.

It was quite true, as it soon appeared. She lived so close by that we had not time to have done humouring her for a few moments before she was at home. Slipping us out at a little side gate, the old lady stopped most unexpectedly in a narrow back street, part of some courts and lanes immediately outside the wall of the inn, and said, "This is my lodging. Pray walk up!"

She had stopped at a shop over which was written KROOK, RAG AND BOTTLE WAREHOUSE. Also, in long thin letters, KROOK, DEALER IN MARINE STORES. In one part of the window was a picture of a red paper mill at which a cart was unloading a quantity of sacks of old rags. In another was the inscription BONES BOUGHT. In another, KITCHEN-STUFF BOUGHT. In another, OLD IRON BOUGHT. In another, WASTE-PAPER BOUGHT. In another, LADIES' AND GENTLEMEN'S WARDROBES BOUGHT. Everything seemed to be bought and nothing to be sold there. In all parts of the window were quantities of dirty bottles—blacking bottles, medicine bottles, ginger-beer and soda-water bottles, pickle bottles, wine bottles, ink bottles; I am reminded by mentioning the latter that the shop had in several little particulars the air of being in a legal neighbourhood and of being, as it were, a dirty hanger-on

and disowned relation of the law. There were a great many ink bottles. There was a little tottering bench of shabby old volumes outside the door, labelled “Law Books, all at 9d.” Some of the inscriptions I have enumerated were written in law-hand, like the papers I had seen in Kenge and Carboy’s office and the letters I had so long received from the firm. Among them was one, in the same writing, having nothing to do with the business of the shop, but announcing that a respectable man aged forty-five wanted engrossing or copying to execute with neatness and dispatch: Address to Nemo, care of Mr. Krook, within. There were several second-hand bags, blue and red, hanging up. A little way within the shop-door lay heaps of old crackled parchment scrolls and discoloured and dog’s-eared law-papers. I could have fancied that all the rusty keys, of which there must have been hundreds huddled together as old iron, had once belonged to doors of rooms or strong chests in lawyers’ offices. The litter of rags tumbled partly into and partly out of a one-legged wooden scale, hanging without any counterpoise from a beam, might have been counsellors’ bands and gowns torn up. One had only to fancy, as Richard whispered to Ada and me while we all stood looking in, that yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients, to make the picture complete.

As it was still foggy and dark, and as the shop was blinded besides by the wall of Lincoln’s Inn, intercepting the light within a couple of yards, we should not have seen so much but for a lighted lantern that an old man in spectacles and a hairy cap was carrying about in the shop. Turning towards the door, he now caught sight of us. He was short, cadaverous, and withered, with his head sunk sideways between his shoulders and the breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth as if he were on fire within. His throat, chin, and eyebrows were so frosted with white hairs and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin that he looked from his breast upward like some old root in a fall of snow.

“Hi, hi!” said the old man, coming to the door. “Have you anything to sell?”

We naturally drew back and glanced at our conductress, who had been trying to open the house-door with a key she had taken from her pocket, and to whom Richard now said that as we had had the pleasure of seeing where she lived, we would leave her, being pressed for time. But she was not to be so easily left. She became so fantastically and pressingly earnest in her

entreaties that we would walk up and see her apartment for an instant, and was so bent, in her harmless way, on leading me in, as part of the good omen she desired, that I (whatever the others might do) saw nothing for it but to comply. I suppose we were all more or less curious; at any rate, when the old man added his persuasions to hers and said, “Aye, aye! Please her! It won’t take a minute! Come in, come in! Come in through the shop if t’other door’s out of order!” we all went in, stimulated by Richard’s laughing encouragement and relying on his protection.

“My landlord, Krook,” said the little old lady, condescending to him from her lofty station as she presented him to us. “He is called among the neighbours the Lord Chancellor. His shop is called the Court of Chancery. He is a very eccentric person. He is very odd. Oh, I assure you he is very odd!”

She shook her head a great many times and tapped her forehead with her finger to express to us that we must have the goodness to excuse him, “For he is a little—you know—M!” said the old lady with great stateliness. The old man overheard, and laughed.

“It’s true enough,” he said, going before us with the lantern, “that they call me the Lord Chancellor and call my shop Chancery. And why do you think they call me the Lord Chancellor and my shop Chancery?”

“I don’t know, I am sure!” said Richard rather carelessly.

“You see,” said the old man, stopping and turning round, “they—Hi! Here’s lovely hair! I have got three sacks of ladies’ hair below, but none so beautiful and fine as this. What colour, and what texture!”

“That’ll do, my good friend!” said Richard, strongly disapproving of his having drawn one of Ada’s tresses through his yellow hand. “You can admire as the rest of us do without taking that liberty.”

The old man darted at him a sudden look which even called my attention from Ada, who, startled and blushing, was so remarkably beautiful that she seemed to fix the wandering attention of the little old lady herself. But as Ada interposed and laughingly said she could only feel proud of such genuine admiration, Mr. Krook shrunk into his former self as suddenly as he had leaped out of it.

“You see, I have so many things here,” he resumed, holding up the lantern, “of so many kinds, and all as the neighbours think (but THEY know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that’s why they

have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net. And I can't abear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbours think, but what do THEY know?) or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery. I don't mind. I go to see my noble and learned brother pretty well every day, when he sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle. Hi, Lady Jane!"

A large grey cat leaped from some neighbouring shelf on his shoulder and startled us all.

"Hi! Show 'em how you scratch. Hi! Tear, my lady!" said her master.

The cat leaped down and ripped at a bundle of rags with her tigerish claws, with a sound that it set my teeth on edge to hear.

"She'd do as much for any one I was to set her on," said the old man. "I deal in cat-skins among other general matters, and hers was offered to me. It's a very fine skin, as you may see, but I didn't have it stripped off! THAT warn't like Chancery practice though, says you!"

He had by this time led us across the shop, and now opened a door in the back part of it, leading to the house-entry. As he stood with his hand upon the lock, the little old lady graciously observed to him before passing out, "That will do, Krook. You mean well, but are tiresome. My young friends are pressed for time. I have none to spare myself, having to attend court very soon. My young friends are the wards in Jarndyce."

"Jarndyce!" said the old man with a start.

"Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The great suit, Krook," returned his lodger.

"Hi!" exclaimed the old man in a tone of thoughtful amazement and with a wider stare than before. "Think of it!"

He seemed so rapt all in a moment and looked so curiously at us that Richard said, "Why, you appear to trouble yourself a good deal about the causes before your noble and learned brother, the other Chancellor!"

"Yes," said the old man abstractedly. "Sure! YOUR name now will be—"

"Richard Carstone."

"Carstone," he repeated, slowly checking off that name upon his forefinger; and each of the others he went on to mention upon a separate

finger. “Yes. There was the name of Barbary, and the name of Clare, and the name of Dedlock, too, I think.”

“He knows as much of the cause as the real salaried Chancellor!” said Richard, quite astonished, to Ada and me.

“Aye!” said the old man, coming slowly out of his abstraction. “Yes! Tom Jarndyce—you’ll excuse me, being related; but he was never known about court by any other name, and was as well known there as—she is now,” nodding slightly at his lodger. “Tom Jarndyce was often in here. He got into a restless habit of strolling about when the cause was on, or expected, talking to the little shopkeepers and telling ’em to keep out of Chancery, whatever they did. ‘For,’ says he, ‘it’s being ground to bits in a slow mill; it’s being roasted at a slow fire; it’s being stung to death by single bees; it’s being drowned by drops; it’s going mad by grains.’ He was as near making away with himself, just where the young lady stands, as near could be.”

We listened with horror.

“He come in at the door,” said the old man, slowly pointing an imaginary track along the shop, “on the day he did it—the whole neighbourhood had said for months before that he would do it, of a certainty sooner or later—he come in at the door that day, and walked along there, and sat himself on a bench that stood there, and asked me (you’ll judge I was a mortal sight younger then) to fetch him a pint of wine. ‘For,’ says he, ‘Krook, I am much depressed; my cause is on again, and I think I’m nearer judgment than I ever was.’ I hadn’t a mind to leave him alone; and I persuaded him to go to the tavern over the way there, t’other side my lane (I mean Chancery Lane); and I followed and looked in at the window, and saw him, comfortable as I thought, in the arm-chair by the fire, and company with him. I hadn’t hardly got back here when I heard a shot go echoing and rattling right away into the inn. I ran out—neighbours ran out—twenty of us cried at once, ‘Tom Jarndyce!’”

The old man stopped, looked hard at us, looked down into the lantern, blew the light out, and shut the lantern up.

“We were right, I needn’t tell the present hearers. Hi! To be sure, how the neighbourhood poured into court that afternoon while the cause was on! How my noble and learned brother, and all the rest of ’em, grubbed and muddled away as usual and tried to look as if they hadn’t heard a word of

the last fact in the case or as if they had—Oh, dear me!—nothing at all to do with it if they had heard of it by any chance!”

Ada’s colour had entirely left her, and Richard was scarcely less pale. Nor could I wonder, judging even from my emotions, and I was no party in the suit, that to hearts so untried and fresh it was a shock to come into the inheritance of a protracted misery, attended in the minds of many people with such dreadful recollections. I had another uneasiness, in the application of the painful story to the poor half-witted creature who had brought us there; but, to my surprise, she seemed perfectly unconscious of that and only led the way upstairs again, informing us with the toleration of a superior creature for the infirmities of a common mortal that her landlord was “a little M, you know!”

She lived at the top of the house, in a pretty large room, from which she had a glimpse of Lincoln’s Inn Hall. This seemed to have been her principal inducement, originally, for taking up her residence there. She could look at it, she said, in the night, especially in the moonshine. Her room was clean, but very, very bare. I noticed the scantiest necessaries in the way of furniture; a few old prints from books, of Chancellors and barristers, wafered against the wall; and some half-dozen reticles and work-bags, “containing documents,” as she informed us. There were neither coals nor ashes in the grate, and I saw no articles of clothing anywhere, nor any kind of food. Upon a shelf in an open cupboard were a plate or two, a cup or two, and so forth, but all dry and empty. There was a more affecting meaning in her pinched appearance, I thought as I looked round, than I had understood before.

“Extremely honoured, I am sure,” said our poor hostess with the greatest suavity, “by this visit from the wards in Jarndyce. And very much indebted for the omen. It is a retired situation. Considering. I am limited as to situation. In consequence of the necessity of attending on the Chancellor. I have lived here many years. I pass my days in court, my evenings and my nights here. I find the nights long, for I sleep but little and think much. That is, of course, unavoidable, being in Chancery. I am sorry I cannot offer chocolate. I expect a judgment shortly and shall then place my establishment on a superior footing. At present, I don’t mind confessing to the wards in Jarndyce (in strict confidence) that I sometimes find it difficult to keep up a genteel appearance. I have felt the cold here. I have felt

something sharper than cold. It matters very little. Pray excuse the introduction of such mean topics."

She partly drew aside the curtain of the long, low garret window and called our attention to a number of bird-cages hanging there, some containing several birds. There were larks, linnets, and goldfinches—I should think at least twenty.

"I began to keep the little creatures," she said, "with an object that the wards will readily comprehend. With the intention of restoring them to liberty. When my judgment should be given. Ye-es! They die in prison, though. Their lives, poor silly things, are so short in comparison with Chancery proceedings that, one by one, the whole collection has died over and over again. I doubt, do you know, whether one of these, though they are all young, will live to be free! Ve-ry mortifying, is it not?"

Although she sometimes asked a question, she never seemed to expect a reply, but rambled on as if she were in the habit of doing so when no one but herself was present.

"Indeed," she pursued, "I positively doubt sometimes, I do assure you, whether while matters are still unsettled, and the sixth or Great Seal still prevails, I may not one day be found lying stark and senseless here, as I have found so many birds!"

Richard, answering what he saw in Ada's compassionate eyes, took the opportunity of laying some money, softly and unobserved, on the chimney-piece. We all drew nearer to the cages, feigning to examine the birds.

"I can't allow them to sing much," said the little old lady, "for (you'll think this curious) I find my mind confused by the idea that they are singing while I am following the arguments in court. And my mind requires to be so very clear, you know! Another time, I'll tell you their names. Not at present. On a day of such good omen, they shall sing as much as they like. In honour of youth," a smile and curtsy, "hope," a smile and curtsy, "and beauty," a smile and curtsy. "There! We'll let in the full light."

The birds began to stir and chirp.

"I cannot admit the air freely," said the little old lady—the room was close, and would have been the better for it—"because the cat you saw downstairs, called Lady Jane, is greedy for their lives. She crouches on the parapet outside for hours and hours. I have discovered," whispering mysteriously, "that her natural cruelty is sharpened by a jealous fear of their

regaining their liberty. In consequence of the judgment I expect being shortly given. She is sly and full of malice. I half believe, sometimes, that she is no cat, but the wolf of the old saying. It is so very difficult to keep her from the door."

Some neighbouring bells, reminding the poor soul that it was half-past nine, did more for us in the way of bringing our visit to an end than we could easily have done for ourselves. She hurriedly took up her little bag of documents, which she had laid upon the table on coming in, and asked if we were also going into court. On our answering no, and that we would on no account detain her, she opened the door to attend us downstairs.

"With such an omen, it is even more necessary than usual that I should be there before the Chancellor comes in," said she, "for he might mention my case the first thing. I have a presentiment that he WILL mention it the first thing this morning."

She stopped to tell us in a whisper as we were going down that the whole house was filled with strange lumber which her landlord had bought piecemeal and had no wish to sell, in consequence of being a little M. This was on the first floor. But she had made a previous stoppage on the second floor and had silently pointed at a dark door there.

"The only other lodger," she now whispered in explanation, "a law-writer. The children in the lanes here say he has sold himself to the devil. I don't know what he can have done with the money. Hush!"

She appeared to mistrust that the lodger might hear her even there, and repeating "Hush!" went before us on tiptoe as though even the sound of her footsteps might reveal to him what she had said.

Passing through the shop on our way out, as we had passed through it on our way in, we found the old man storing a quantity of packets of waste-paper in a kind of well in the floor. He seemed to be working hard, with the perspiration standing on his forehead, and had a piece of chalk by him, with which, as he put each separate package or bundle down, he made a crooked mark on the panelling of the wall.

Richard and Ada, and Miss Jellyby, and the little old lady had gone by him, and I was going when he touched me on the arm to stay me, and chalked the letter J upon the wall—in a very curious manner, beginning with the end of the letter and shaping it backward. It was a capital letter, not a printed one, but just such a letter as any clerk in Messrs. Kenge and

Carboy's office would have made.

"Can you read it?" he asked me with a keen glance.

"Surely," said I. "It's very plain."

"What is it?"

"J."

With another glance at me, and a glance at the door, he rubbed it out and turned an "a" in its place (not a capital letter this time), and said, "What's that?"

I told him. He then rubbed that out and turned the letter "r," and asked me the same question. He went on quickly until he had formed in the same curious manner, beginning at the ends and bottoms of the letters, the word Jarndyce, without once leaving two letters on the wall together.

"What does that spell?" he asked me.

When I told him, he laughed. In the same odd way, yet with the same rapidity, he then produced singly, and rubbed out singly, the letters forming the words Bleak House. These, in some astonishment, I also read; and he laughed again.

"Hi!" said the old man, laying aside the chalk. "I have a turn for copying from memory, you see, miss, though I can neither read nor write."

He looked so disagreeable and his cat looked so wickedly at me, as if I were a blood-relation of the birds upstairs, that I was quite relieved by Richard's appearing at the door and saying, "Miss Summerson, I hope you are not bargaining for the sale of your hair. Don't be tempted. Three sacks below are quite enough for Mr. Krook!"

I lost no time in wishing Mr. Krook good morning and joining my friends outside, where we parted with the little old lady, who gave us her blessing with great ceremony and renewed her assurance of yesterday in reference to her intention of settling estates on Ada and me. Before we finally turned out of those lanes, we looked back and saw Mr. Krook standing at his shop-door, in his spectacles, looking after us, with his cat upon his shoulder, and her tail sticking up on one side of his hairy cap like a tall feather.

"Quite an adventure for a morning in London!" said Richard with a sigh. "Ah, cousin, cousin, it's a weary word this Chancery!"

"It is to me, and has been ever since I can remember," returned Ada. "I am grieved that I should be the enemy—as I suppose I am—of a great

number of relations and others, and that they should be my enemies—as I suppose they are—and that we should all be ruining one another without knowing how or why and be in constant doubt and discord all our lives. It seems very strange, as there must be right somewhere, that an honest judge in real earnest has not been able to find out through all these years where it is."

"Ah, cousin!" said Richard. "Strange, indeed! All this wasteful, wanton chess-playing IS very strange. To see that composed court yesterday jogging on so serenely and to think of the wretchedness of the pieces on the board gave me the headache and the heartache both together. My head ached with wondering how it happened, if men were neither fools nor rascals; and my heart ached to think they could possibly be either. But at all events, Ada—I may call you Ada?"

"Of course you may, cousin Richard."

"At all events, Chancery will work none of its bad influences on US. We have happily been brought together, thanks to our good kinsman, and it can't divide us now!"

"Never, I hope, cousin Richard!" said Ada gently.

Miss Jellyby gave my arm a squeeze and me a very significant look. I smiled in return, and we made the rest of the way back very pleasantly.

In half an hour after our arrival, Mrs. Jellyby appeared; and in the course of an hour the various things necessary for breakfast straggled one by one into the dining-room. I do not doubt that Mrs. Jellyby had gone to bed and got up in the usual manner, but she presented no appearance of having changed her dress. She was greatly occupied during breakfast, for the morning's post brought a heavy correspondence relative to Borrioboola-Gha, which would occasion her (she said) to pass a busy day. The children tumbled about, and notched memoranda of their accidents in their legs, which were perfect little calendars of distress; and Peepy was lost for an hour and a half, and brought home from Newgate market by a policeman. The equable manner in which Mrs. Jellyby sustained both his absence and his restoration to the family circle surprised us all.

She was by that time perseveringly dictating to Caddy, and Caddy was fast relapsing into the inky condition in which we had found her. At one o'clock an open carriage arrived for us, and a cart for our luggage. Mrs. Jellyby charged us with many remembrances to her good friend Mr.

Jarndyce; Caddy left her desk to see us depart, kissed me in the passage, and stood biting her pen and sobbing on the steps; Peepy, I am happy to say, was asleep and spared the pain of separation (I was not without misgivings that he had gone to Newgate market in search of me); and all the other children got up behind the barouche and fell off, and we saw them, with great concern, scattered over the surface of Thavies Inn as we rolled out of its precincts.

CHAPTER VI

Quite at Home

THE DAY HAD BRIGHTENED very much, and still brightened as we went westward. We went our way through the sunshine and the fresh air, wondering more and more at the extent of the streets, the brilliancy of the shops, the great traffic, and the crowds of people whom the pleasanter weather seemed to have brought out like many-coloured flowers. By and by we began to leave the wonderful city and to proceed through suburbs which, of themselves, would have made a pretty large town in my eyes; and at last we got into a real country road again, with windmills, rick-yards, milestones, farmers' waggons, scents of old hay, swinging signs, and horse troughs: trees, fields, and hedge-rows. It was delightful to see the green landscape before us and the immense metropolis behind; and when a waggon with a train of beautiful horses, furnished with red trappings and clear-sounding bells, came by us with its music, I believe we could all three have sung to the bells, so cheerful were the influences around.

"The whole road has been reminding me of my namesake Whittington," said Richard, "and that waggon is the finishing touch. Halloa! What's the matter?"

We had stopped, and the waggon had stopped too. Its music changed as the horses came to a stand, and subsided to a gentle tinkling, except when a horse tossed his head or shook himself and sprinkled off a little shower of bell-ringing.

"Our postilion is looking after the waggoner," said Richard, "and the waggoner is coming back after us. Good day, friend!" The waggoner was at our coach-door. "Why, here's an extraordinary thing!" added Richard, looking closely at the man. "He has got your name, Ada, in his hat!"

He had all our names in his hat. Tucked within the band were three small notes—one addressed to Ada, one to Richard, one to me. These the waggoner delivered to each of us respectively, reading the name aloud first. In answer to Richard's inquiry from whom they came, he briefly answered,

“Master, sir, if you please”; and putting on his hat again (which was like a soft bowl), cracked his whip, re-awakened his music, and went melodiously away.

“Is that Mr. Jarndyce’s waggon?” said Richard, calling to our post-boy.

“Yes, sir,” he replied. “Going to London.”

We opened the notes. Each was a counterpart of the other and contained these words in a solid, plain hand.

> I look forward, my dear, to our meeting easily and without constraint on either side. I therefore have to propose that we meet as old friends and take the past for granted. It will be a relief to you possibly, and to me certainly, and so my love to you.
>
> John Jarndyce

I had perhaps less reason to be surprised than either of my companions, having never yet enjoyed an opportunity of thanking one who had been my benefactor and sole earthly dependence through so many years. I had not considered how I could thank him, my gratitude lying too deep in my heart for that; but I now began to consider how I could meet him without thanking him, and felt it would be very difficult indeed.

The notes revived in Richard and Ada a general impression that they both had, without quite knowing how they came by it, that their cousin Jarndyce could never bear acknowledgments for any kindness he performed and that sooner than receive any he would resort to the most singular expedients and evasions or would even run away. Ada dimly remembered to have heard her mother tell, when she was a very little child, that he had once done her an act of uncommon generosity and that on her going to his house to thank him, he happened to see her through a window coming to the door, and immediately escaped by the back gate, and was not heard of for three months. This discourse led to a great deal more on the same theme, and indeed it lasted us all day, and we talked of scarcely anything else. If we did by any chance diverge into another subject, we soon returned to this, and wondered what the house would be like, and when we should get there, and whether we should see Mr. Jarndyce as soon as we arrived or after a delay, and what he would say to us, and what we should say to him. All of which we wondered about, over and over again.

The roads were very heavy for the horses, but the pathway was generally good, so we alighted and walked up all the hills, and liked it so well that we prolonged our walk on the level ground when we got to the top. At Barnet there were other horses waiting for us, but as they had only just been fed, we had to wait for them too, and got a long fresh walk over a common and an old battle-field before the carriage came up. These delays so protracted the journey that the short day was spent and the long night had closed in before we came to St. Albans, near to which town Bleak House was, we knew.

By that time we were so anxious and nervous that even Richard confessed, as we rattled over the stones of the old street, to feeling an irrational desire to drive back again. As to Ada and me, whom he had wrapped up with great care, the night being sharp and frosty, we trembled from head to foot. When we turned out of the town, round a corner, and Richard told us that the post-boy, who had for a long time sympathized with our heightened expectation, was looking back and nodding, we both stood up in the carriage (Richard holding Ada lest she should be jolted down) and gazed round upon the open country and the starlight night for our destination. There was a light sparkling on the top of a hill before us, and the driver, pointing to it with his whip and crying, “That’s Bleak House!” put his horses into a canter and took us forward at such a rate, uphill though it was, that the wheels sent the road drift flying about our heads like spray from a water-mill. Presently we lost the light, presently saw it, presently lost it, presently saw it, and turned into an avenue of trees and cantered up towards where it was beaming brightly. It was in a window of what seemed to be an old-fashioned house with three peaks in the roof in front and a circular sweep leading to the porch. A bell was rung as we drew up, and amidst the sound of its deep voice in the still air, and the distant barking of some dogs, and a gush of light from the opened door, and the smoking and steaming of the heated horses, and the quickened beating of our own hearts, we alighted in no inconsiderable confusion.

“Ada, my love, Esther, my dear, you are welcome. I rejoice to see you! Rick, if I had a hand to spare at present, I would give it you!”

The gentleman who said these words in a clear, bright, hospitable voice had one of his arms round Ada’s waist and the other round mine, and kissed us both in a fatherly way, and bore us across the hall into a ruddy little

room, all in a glow with a blazing fire. Here he kissed us again, and opening his arms, made us sit down side by side on a sofa ready drawn out near the hearth. I felt that if we had been at all demonstrative, he would have run away in a moment.

"Now, Rick!" said he. "I have a hand at liberty. A word in earnest is as good as a speech. I am heartily glad to see you. You are at home. Warm yourself!"

Richard shook him by both hands with an intuitive mixture of respect and frankness, and only saying (though with an earnestness that rather alarmed me, I was so afraid of Mr. Jarndyce's suddenly disappearing), "You are very kind, sir! We are very much obliged to you!" laid aside his hat and coat and came up to the fire.

"And how did you like the ride? And how did you like Mrs. Jellyby, my dear?" said Mr. Jarndyce to Ada.

While Ada was speaking to him in reply, I glanced (I need not say with how much interest) at his face. It was a handsome, lively, quick face, full of change and motion; and his hair was a silvered iron-grey. I took him to be nearer sixty than fifty, but he was upright, hearty, and robust. From the moment of his first speaking to us his voice had connected itself with an association in my mind that I could not define; but now, all at once, a something sudden in his manner and a pleasant expression in his eyes recalled the gentleman in the stagecoach six years ago on the memorable day of my journey to Reading. I was certain it was he. I never was so frightened in my life as when I made the discovery, for he caught my glance, and appearing to read my thoughts, gave such a look at the door that I thought we had lost him.

However, I am happy to say he remained where he was, and asked me what I thought of Mrs. Jellyby.

"She exerts herself very much for Africa, sir," I said.

"Nobly!" returned Mr. Jarndyce. "But you answer like Ada." Whom I had not heard. "You all think something else, I see."

"We rather thought," said I, glancing at Richard and Ada, who entreated me with their eyes to speak, "that perhaps she was a little unmindful of her home."

"Floored!" cried Mr. Jarndyce.

I was rather alarmed again.

“Well! I want to know your real thoughts, my dear. I may have sent you there on purpose.”

“We thought that, perhaps,” said I, hesitating, “it is right to begin with the obligations of home, sir; and that, perhaps, while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them.”

“The little Jellybys,” said Richard, coming to my relief, “are really—I can’t help expressing myself strongly, sir—in a devil of a state.”

“She means well,” said Mr. Jarndyce hastily. “The wind’s in the east.”

“It was in the north, sir, as we came down,” observed Richard.

“My dear Rick,” said Mr. Jarndyce, poking the fire, “I’ll take an oath it’s either in the east or going to be. I am always conscious of an uncomfortable sensation now and then when the wind is blowing in the east.”

“Rheumatism, sir?” said Richard.

“I dare say it is, Rick. I believe it is. And so the little Jell—I had my doubts about ’em—are in a—oh, Lord, yes, it’s easterly!” said Mr. Jarndyce.

He had taken two or three undecided turns up and down while uttering these broken sentences, retaining the poker in one hand and rubbing his hair with the other, with a good-natured vexation at once so whimsical and so lovable that I am sure we were more delighted with him than we could possibly have expressed in any words. He gave an arm to Ada and an arm to me, and bidding Richard bring a candle, was leading the way out when he suddenly turned us all back again.

“Those little Jellybys. Couldn’t you—didn’t you—now, if it had rained sugar-plums, or three-cornered raspberry tarts, or anything of that sort!” said Mr. Jarndyce.

“Oh, cousin—” Ada hastily began.

“Good, my pretty pet. I like cousin. Cousin John, perhaps, is better.”

“Then, cousin John—” Ada laughingly began again.

“Ha, ha! Very good indeed!” said Mr. Jarndyce with great enjoyment. “Sounds uncommonly natural. Yes, my dear?”

“It did better than that. It rained Esther.”

“Aye?” said Mr. Jarndyce. “What did Esther do?”

“Why, cousin John,” said Ada, clasping her hands upon his arm and shaking her head at me across him—for I wanted her to be quiet—“Esther was their friend directly. Esther nursed them, coaxed them to sleep, washed

and dressed them, told them stories, kept them quiet, bought them keepsakes"—My dear girl! I had only gone out with Peepy after he was found and given him a little, tiny horse!—"and, cousin John, she softened poor Caroline, the eldest one, so much and was so thoughtful for me and so amiable! No, no, I won't be contradicted, Esther dear! You know, you know, it's true!"

The warm-hearted darling leaned across her cousin John and kissed me, and then looking up in his face, boldly said, "At all events, cousin John, I WILL thank you for the companion you have given me." I felt as if she challenged him to run away. But he didn't.

"Where did you say the wind was, Rick?" asked Mr. Jarndyce.

"In the north as we came down, sir."

"You are right. There's no east in it. A mistake of mine. Come, girls, come and see your home!"

It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where there is a bountiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage-rooms in unexpected places with lattice windows and green growth pressing through them. Mine, which we entered first, was of this kind, with an up-and-down roof that had more corners in it than I ever counted afterwards and a chimney (there was a wood fire on the hearth) paved all around with pure white tiles, in every one of which a bright miniature of the fire was blazing. Out of this room, you went down two steps into a charming little sitting-room looking down upon a flower-garden, which room was henceforth to belong to Ada and me. Out of this you went up three steps into Ada's bedroom, which had a fine broad window commanding a beautiful view (we saw a great expanse of darkness lying underneath the stars), to which there was a hollow window-seat, in which, with a spring-lock, three dear Adas might have been lost at once. Out of this room you passed into a little gallery, with which the other best rooms (only two) communicated, and so, by a little staircase of shallow steps with a number of corner stairs in it, considering its length, down into the hall. But if instead of going out at Ada's door you came back into my room, and went out at the door by which you had entered it, and turned up a few crooked steps that branched off in an unexpected manner from the

stairs, you lost yourself in passages, with mangles in them, and three-cornered tables, and a native Hindu chair, which was also a sofa, a box, and a bedstead, and looked in every form something between a bamboo skeleton and a great bird-cage, and had been brought from India nobody knew by whom or when. From these you came on Richard's room, which was part library, part sitting-room, part bedroom, and seemed indeed a comfortable compound of many rooms. Out of that you went straight, with a little interval of passage, to the plain room where Mr. Jarndyce slept, all the year round, with his window open, his bedstead without any furniture standing in the middle of the floor for more air, and his cold bath gaping for him in a smaller room adjoining. Out of that you came into another passage, where there were back-stairs and where you could hear the horses being rubbed down outside the stable and being told to "Hold up" and "Get over," as they slipped about very much on the uneven stones. Or you might, if you came out at another door (every room had at least two doors), go straight down to the hall again by half-a-dozen steps and a low archway, wondering how you got back there or had ever got out of it.

The furniture, old-fashioned rather than old, like the house, was as pleasantly irregular. Ada's sleeping-room was all flowers—in chintz and paper, in velvet, in needlework, in the brocade of two stiff courtly chairs which stood, each attended by a little page of a stool for greater state, on either side of the fire-place. Our sitting-room was green and had framed and glazed upon the walls numbers of surprising and surprised birds, staring out of pictures at a real trout in a case, as brown and shining as if it had been served with gravy; at the death of Captain Cook; and at the whole process of preparing tea in China, as depicted by Chinese artists. In my room there were oval engravings of the months—ladies haymaking in short waists and large hats tied under the chin, for June; smooth-legged noblemen pointing with cocked-hats to village steeples, for October. Half-length portraits in crayons abounded all through the house, but were so dispersed that I found the brother of a youthful officer of mine in the china-closet and the grey old age of my pretty young bride, with a flower in her bodice, in the breakfast-room. As substitutes, I had four angels, of Queen Anne's reign, taking a complacent gentleman to heaven, in festoons, with some difficulty; and a composition in needlework representing fruit, a kettle, and an alphabet. All the movables, from the wardrobes to the chairs and tables, hangings,

glasses, even to the pincushions and scent-bottles on the dressing-tables, displayed the same quaint variety. They agreed in nothing but their perfect neatness, their display of the whitest linen, and their storing-up, wheresoever the existence of a drawer, small or large, rendered it possible, of quantities of rose-leaves and sweet lavender. Such, with its illuminated windows, softened here and there by shadows of curtains, shining out upon the starlight night; with its light, and warmth, and comfort; with its hospitable jingle, at a distance, of preparations for dinner; with the face of its generous master brightening everything we saw; and just wind enough without to sound a low accompaniment to everything we heard, were our first impressions of Bleak House.

"I am glad you like it," said Mr. Jarndyce when he had brought us round again to Ada's sitting-room. "It makes no pretensions, but it is a comfortable little place, I hope, and will be more so with such bright young looks in it. You have barely half an hour before dinner. There's no one here but the finest creature upon earth—a child."

"More children, Esther!" said Ada.

"I don't mean literally a child," pursued Mr. Jarndyce; "not a child in years. He is grown up—he is at least as old as I am—but in simplicity, and freshness, and enthusiasm, and a fine guileless inaptitude for all worldly affairs, he is a perfect child."

We felt that he must be very interesting.

"He knows Mrs. Jellyby," said Mr. Jarndyce. "He is a musical man, an amateur, but might have been a professional. He is an artist too, an amateur, but might have been a professional. He is a man of attainments and of captivating manners. He has been unfortunate in his affairs, and unfortunate in his pursuits, and unfortunate in his family; but he don't care—he's a child!"

"Did you imply that he has children of his own, sir?" inquired Richard.

"Yes, Rick! Half-a-dozen. More! Nearer a dozen, I should think. But he has never looked after them. How could he? He wanted somebody to look after HIM. He is a child, you know!" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"And have the children looked after themselves at all, sir?" inquired Richard.

"Why, just as you may suppose," said Mr. Jarndyce, his countenance suddenly falling. "It is said that the children of the very poor are not

brought up, but dragged up. Harold Skimpole's children have tumbled up somehow or other. The wind's getting round again, I am afraid. I feel it rather!"

Richard observed that the situation was exposed on a sharp night.

"It IS exposed," said Mr. Jarndyce. "No doubt that's the cause. Bleak House has an exposed sound. But you are coming my way. Come along!"

Our luggage having arrived and being all at hand, I was dressed in a few minutes and engaged in putting my worldly goods away when a maid (not the one in attendance upon Ada, but another, whom I had not seen) brought a basket into my room with two bunches of keys in it, all labelled.

"For you, miss, if you please," said she.

"For me?" said I.

"The housekeeping keys, miss."

I showed my surprise, for she added with some little surprise on her own part, "I was told to bring them as soon as you was alone, miss. Miss Summerson, if I don't deceive myself?"

"Yes," said I. "That is my name."

"The large bunch is the housekeeping, and the little bunch is the cellars, miss. Any time you was pleased to appoint to-morrow morning, I was to show you the presses and things they belong to."

I said I would be ready at half-past six, and after she was gone, stood looking at the basket, quite lost in the magnitude of my trust. Ada found me thus and had such a delightful confidence in me when I showed her the keys and told her about them that it would have been insensibility and ingratitude not to feel encouraged. I knew, to be sure, that it was the dear girl's kindness, but I liked to be so pleasantly cheated.

When we went downstairs, we were presented to Mr. Skimpole, who was standing before the fire telling Richard how fond he used to be, in his school-time, of football. He was a little bright creature with a rather large head, but a delicate face and a sweet voice, and there was a perfect charm in him. All he said was so free from effort and spontaneous and was said with such a captivating gaiety that it was fascinating to hear him talk. Being of a more slender figure than Mr. Jarndyce and having a richer complexion, with browner hair, he looked younger. Indeed, he had more the appearance in all respects of a damaged young man than a well-preserved elderly one. There was an easy negligence in his manner and even in his dress (his hair

carelessly disposed, and his neckkerchief loose and flowing, as I have seen artists paint their own portraits) which I could not separate from the idea of a romantic youth who had undergone some unique process of depreciation. It struck me as being not at all like the manner or appearance of a man who had advanced in life by the usual road of years, cares, and experiences.

I gathered from the conversation that Mr. Skimpole had been educated for the medical profession and had once lived, in his professional capacity, in the household of a German prince. He told us, however, that as he had always been a mere child in point of weights and measures and had never known anything about them (except that they disgusted him), he had never been able to prescribe with the requisite accuracy of detail. In fact, he said, he had no head for detail. And he told us, with great humour, that when he was wanted to bleed the prince or physic any of his people, he was generally found lying on his back in bed, reading the newspapers or making fancy-sketches in pencil, and couldn't come. The prince, at last, objecting to this, "in which," said Mr. Skimpole, in the frankest manner, "he was perfectly right," the engagement terminated, and Mr. Skimpole having (as he added with delightful gaiety) "nothing to live upon but love, fell in love, and married, and surrounded himself with rosy cheeks." His good friend Jarndyce and some other of his good friends then helped him, in quicker or slower succession, to several openings in life, but to no purpose, for he must confess to two of the oldest infirmities in the world: one was that he had no idea of time, the other that he had no idea of money. In consequence of which he never kept an appointment, never could transact any business, and never knew the value of anything! Well! So he had got on in life, and here he was! He was very fond of reading the papers, very fond of making fancy-sketches with a pencil, very fond of nature, very fond of art. All he asked of society was to let him live. THAT wasn't much. His wants were few. Give him the papers, conversation, music, mutton, coffee, landscape, fruit in the season, a few sheets of Bristol-board, and a little claret, and he asked no more. He was a mere child in the world, but he didn't cry for the moon. He said to the world, "Go your several ways in peace! Wear red coats, blue coats, lawn sleeves; put pens behind your ears, wear aprons; go after glory, holiness, commerce, trade, any object you prefer; only—let Harold Skimpole live!"

All this and a great deal more he told us, not only with the utmost

brilliancy and enjoyment, but with a certain vivacious candour—speaking of himself as if he were not at all his own affair, as if Skimpole were a third person, as if he knew that Skimpole had his singularities but still had his claims too, which were the general business of the community and must not be slighted. He was quite enchanting. If I felt at all confused at that early time in endeavouring to reconcile anything he said with anything I had thought about the duties and accountabilities of life (which I am far from sure of), I was confused by not exactly understanding why he was free of them. That he WAS free of them, I scarcely doubted; he was so very clear about it himself.

"I covet nothing," said Mr. Skimpole in the same light way. "Possession is nothing to me. Here is my friend Jarndyce's excellent house. I feel obliged to him for possessing it. I can sketch it and alter it. I can set it to music. When I am here, I have sufficient possession of it and have neither trouble, cost, nor responsibility. My steward's name, in short, is Jarndyce, and he can't cheat me. We have been mentioning Mrs. Jellyby. There is a bright-eyed woman, of a strong will and immense power of business detail, who throws herself into objects with surprising ardour! I don't regret that I have not a strong will and an immense power of business detail to throw myself into objects with surprising ardour. I can admire her without envy. I can sympathize with the objects. I can dream of them. I can lie down on the grass—in fine weather—and float along an African river, embracing all the natives I meet, as sensible of the deep silence and sketching the dense overhanging tropical growth as accurately as if I were there. I don't know that it's of any direct use my doing so, but it's all I can do, and I do it thoroughly. Then, for heaven's sake, having Harold Skimpole, a confiding child, petitioning you, the world, an agglomeration of practical people of business habits, to let him live and admire the human family, do it somehow or other, like good souls, and suffer him to ride his rocking-horse!"

It was plain enough that Mr. Jarndyce had not been neglectful of the adjuration. Mr. Skimpole's general position there would have rendered it so without the addition of what he presently said.

"It's only you, the generous creatures, whom I envy," said Mr. Skimpole, addressing us, his new friends, in an impersonal manner. "I envy you your power of doing what you do. It is what I should revel in myself. I don't feel any vulgar gratitude to you. I almost feel as if YOU ought to be grateful to

ME for giving you the opportunity of enjoying the luxury of generosity. I know you like it. For anything I can tell, I may have come into the world expressly for the purpose of increasing your stock of happiness. I may have been born to be a benefactor to you by sometimes giving you an opportunity of assisting me in my little perplexities. Why should I regret my incapacity for details and worldly affairs when it leads to such pleasant consequences? I don't regret it therefore."

Of all his playful speeches (playful, yet always fully meaning what they expressed) none seemed to be more to the taste of Mr. Jarndyce than this. I had often new temptations, afterwards, to wonder whether it was really singular, or only singular to me, that he, who was probably the most grateful of mankind upon the least occasion, should so desire to escape the gratitude of others.

We were all enchanted. I felt it a merited tribute to the engaging qualities of Ada and Richard that Mr. Skimpole, seeing them for the first time, should be so unreserved and should lay himself out to be so exquisitely agreeable. They (and especially Richard) were naturally pleased, for similar reasons, and considered it no common privilege to be so freely confided in by such an attractive man. The more we listened, the more gaily Mr. Skimpole talked. And what with his fine hilarious manner and his engaging candour and his genial way of lightly tossing his own weaknesses about, as if he had said, "I am a child, you know! You are designing people compared with me" (he really made me consider myself in that light) "but I am gay and innocent; forget your worldly arts and play with me!" the effect was absolutely dazzling.

He was so full of feeling too and had such a delicate sentiment for what was beautiful or tender that he could have won a heart by that alone. In the evening, when I was preparing to make tea and Ada was touching the piano in the adjoining room and softly humming a tune to her cousin Richard, which they had happened to mention, he came and sat down on the sofa near me and so spoke of Ada that I almost loved him.

"She is like the morning," he said. "With that golden hair, those blue eyes, and that fresh bloom on her cheek, she is like the summer morning. The birds here will mistake her for it. We will not call such a lovely young creature as that, who is a joy to all mankind, an orphan. She is the child of the universe."

Mr. Jarndyce, I found, was standing near us with his hands behind him and an attentive smile upon his face.

“The universe,” he observed, “makes rather an indifferent parent, I am afraid.”

“Oh! I don’t know!” cried Mr. Skimpole buoyantly.

“I think I do know,” said Mr. Jarndyce.

“Well!” cried Mr. Skimpole. “You know the world (which in your sense is the universe), and I know nothing of it, so you shall have your way. But if I had mine,” glancing at the cousins, “there should be no brambles of sordid realities in such a path as that. It should be strewn with roses; it should lie through bowers, where there was no spring, autumn, nor winter, but perpetual summer. Age or change should never wither it. The base word money should never be breathed near it!”

Mr. Jarndyce patted him on the head with a smile, as if he had been really a child, and passing a step or two on, and stopping a moment, glanced at the young cousins. His look was thoughtful, but had a benignant expression in it which I often (how often!) saw again, which has long been engraven on my heart. The room in which they were, communicating with that in which he stood, was only lighted by the fire. Ada sat at the piano; Richard stood beside her, bending down. Upon the wall, their shadows blended together, surrounded by strange forms, not without a ghostly motion caught from the unsteady fire, though reflecting from motionless objects. Ada touched the notes so softly and sang so low that the wind, sighing away to the distant hills, was as audible as the music. The mystery of the future and the little clue afforded to it by the voice of the present seemed expressed in the whole picture.

But it is not to recall this fancy, well as I remember it, that I recall the scene. First, I was not quite unconscious of the contrast in respect of meaning and intention between the silent look directed that way and the flow of words that had preceded it. Secondly, though Mr. Jarndyce’s glance as he withdrew it rested for but a moment on me, I felt as if in that moment he confided to me—and knew that he confided to me and that I received the confidence—his hope that Ada and Richard might one day enter on a dearer relationship.

Mr. Skimpole could play on the piano and the violoncello, and he was a composer—had composed half an opera once, but got tired of it—and

played what he composed with taste. After tea we had quite a little concert, in which Richard—who was enthralled by Ada's singing and told me that she seemed to know all the songs that ever were written—and Mr. Jarndyce, and I were the audience. After a little while I missed first Mr. Skimpole and afterwards Richard, and while I was thinking how could Richard stay away so long and lose so much, the maid who had given me the keys looked in at the door, saying, "If you please, miss, could you spare a minute?"

When I was shut out with her in the hall, she said, holding up her hands, "Oh, if you please, miss, Mr. Carstone says would you come upstairs to Mr. Skimpole's room. He has been took, miss!"

"Took?" said I.

"Took, miss. Sudden," said the maid.

I was apprehensive that his illness might be of a dangerous kind, but of course I begged her to be quiet and not disturb any one and collected myself, as I followed her quickly upstairs, sufficiently to consider what were the best remedies to be applied if it should prove to be a fit. She threw open a door and I went into a chamber, where, to my unspeakable surprise, instead of finding Mr. Skimpole stretched upon the bed or prostrate on the floor, I found him standing before the fire smiling at Richard, while Richard, with a face of great embarrassment, looked at a person on the sofa, in a white great-coat, with smooth hair upon his head and not much of it, which he was wiping smoother and making less of with a pocket-handkerchief.

"Miss Summerson," said Richard hurriedly, "I am glad you are come. You will be able to advise us. Our friend Mr. Skimpole—don't be alarmed! —is arrested for debt."

"And really, my dear Miss Summerson," said Mr. Skimpole with his agreeable candour, "I never was in a situation in which that excellent sense and quiet habit of method and usefulness, which anybody must observe in you who has the happiness of being a quarter of an hour in your society, was more needed."

The person on the sofa, who appeared to have a cold in his head, gave such a very loud snort that he startled me.

"Are you arrested for much, sir?" I inquired of Mr. Skimpole.

"My dear Miss Summerson," said he, shaking his head pleasantly, "I don't know. Some pounds, odd shillings, and halfpence, I think, were

mentioned.”

“It’s twenty-four pound, sixteen, and sevenpence ha’penny,” observed the stranger. “That’s wot it is.”

“And it sounds—somehow it sounds,” said Mr. Skimpole, “like a small sum?”

The strange man said nothing but made another snort. It was such a powerful one that it seemed quite to lift him out of his seat.

“Mr. Skimpole,” said Richard to me, “has a delicacy in applying to my cousin Jarndyce because he has lately—I think, sir, I understood you that you had lately—”

“Oh, yes!” returned Mr. Skimpole, smiling. “Though I forgot how much it was and when it was. Jarndyce would readily do it again, but I have the epicure-like feeling that I would prefer a novelty in help, that I would rather,” and he looked at Richard and me, “develop generosity in a new soil and in a new form of flower.”

“What do you think will be best, Miss Summerson?” said Richard, aside.

I ventured to inquire, generally, before replying, what would happen if the money were not produced.

“Jail,” said the strange man, coolly putting his handkerchief into his hat, which was on the floor at his feet. “Or Coavinses.”

“May I ask, sir, what is—”

“Coavinses?” said the strange man. “A ’ouse.”

Richard and I looked at one another again. It was a most singular thing that the arrest was our embarrassment and not Mr. Skimpole’s. He observed us with a genial interest, but there seemed, if I may venture on such a contradiction, nothing selfish in it. He had entirely washed his hands of the difficulty, and it had become ours.

“I thought,” he suggested, as if good-naturedly to help us out, “that being parties in a Chancery suit concerning (as people say) a large amount of property, Mr. Richard or his beautiful cousin, or both, could sign something, or make over something, or give some sort of undertaking, or pledge, or bond? I don’t know what the business name of it may be, but I suppose there is some instrument within their power that would settle this?”

“Not a bit on it,” said the strange man.

“Really?” returned Mr. Skimpole. “That seems odd, now, to one who is no judge of these things!”

“Odd or even,” said the stranger gruffly, “I tell you, not a bit on it!”

“Keep your temper, my good fellow, keep your temper!” Mr. Skimpole gently reasoned with him as he made a little drawing of his head on the fly-leaf of a book. “Don’t be ruffled by your occupation. We can separate you from your office; we can separate the individual from the pursuit. We are not so prejudiced as to suppose that in private life you are otherwise than a very estimable man, with a great deal of poetry in your nature, of which you may not be conscious.”

The stranger only answered with another violent snort, whether in acceptance of the poetry-tribute or in disdainful rejection of it, he did not express to me.

“Now, my dear Miss Summerson, and my dear Mr. Richard,” said Mr. Skimpole gaily, innocently, and confidingly as he looked at his drawing with his head on one side, “here you see me utterly incapable of helping myself, and entirely in your hands! I only ask to be free. The butterflies are free. Mankind will surely not deny to Harold Skimpole what it concedes to the butterflies!”

“My dear Miss Summerson,” said Richard in a whisper, “I have ten pounds that I received from Mr. Kenge. I must try what that will do.”

I possessed fifteen pounds, odd shillings, which I had saved from my quarterly allowance during several years. I had always thought that some accident might happen which would throw me suddenly, without any relation or any property, on the world and had always tried to keep some little money by me that I might not be quite penniless. I told Richard of my having this little store and having no present need of it, and I asked him delicately to inform Mr. Skimpole, while I should be gone to fetch it, that we would have the pleasure of paying his debt.

When I came back, Mr. Skimpole kissed my hand and seemed quite touched. Not on his own account (I was again aware of that perplexing and extraordinary contradiction), but on ours, as if personal considerations were impossible with him and the contemplation of our happiness alone affected him. Richard, begging me, for the greater grace of the transaction, as he said, to settle with Coavinses (as Mr. Skimpole now jocularly called him), I counted out the money and received the necessary acknowledgment. This, too, delighted Mr. Skimpole.

His compliments were so delicately administered that I blushed less than

I might have done and settled with the stranger in the white coat without making any mistakes. He put the money in his pocket and shortly said, “Well, then, I’ll wish you a good evening, miss.

“My friend,” said Mr. Skimpole, standing with his back to the fire after giving up the sketch when it was half finished, “I should like to ask you something, without offence.”

I think the reply was, “Cut away, then!”

“Did you know this morning, now, that you were coming out on this errand?” said Mr. Skimpole.

“Know’d it yes’day aft’noon at tea-time,” said Coavinses.

“It didn’t affect your appetite? Didn’t make you at all uneasy?”

“Not a bit,” said Coavinses. “I know’d if you wos missed to-day, you wouldn’t be missed to-morrow. A day makes no such odds.”

“But when you came down here,” proceeded Mr. Skimpole, “it was a fine day. The sun was shining, the wind was blowing, the lights and shadows were passing across the fields, the birds were singing.”

“Nobody said they warn’t, in MY hearing,” returned Coavinses.

“No,” observed Mr. Skimpole. “But what did you think upon the road?”

“Wot do you mean?” growled Coavinses with an appearance of strong resentment. “Think! I’ve got enough to do, and little enough to get for it without thinking. Thinking!” (with profound contempt).

“Then you didn’t think, at all events,” proceeded Mr. Skimpole, “to this effect: ‘Harold Skimpole loves to see the sun shine, loves to hear the wind blow, loves to watch the changing lights and shadows, loves to hear the birds, those choristers in Nature’s great cathedral. And does it seem to me that I am about to deprive Harold Skimpole of his share in such possessions, which are his only birthright!’ You thought nothing to that effect?”

“I—certainly—did—NOT,” said Coavinses, whose doggedness in utterly renouncing the idea was of that intense kind that he could only give adequate expression to it by putting a long interval between each word, and accompanying the last with a jerk that might have dislocated his neck.

“Very odd and very curious, the mental process is, in you men of business!” said Mr. Skimpole thoughtfully. “Thank you, my friend. Good night.”

As our absence had been long enough already to seem strange

downstairs, I returned at once and found Ada sitting at work by the fireside talking to her cousin John. Mr. Skimpole presently appeared, and Richard shortly after him. I was sufficiently engaged during the remainder of the evening in taking my first lesson in backgammon from Mr. Jarndyce, who was very fond of the game and from whom I wished of course to learn it as quickly as I could in order that I might be of the very small use of being able to play when he had no better adversary. But I thought, occasionally, when Mr. Skimpole played some fragments of his own compositions or when, both at the piano and the violoncello, and at our table, he preserved with an absence of all effort his delightful spirits and his easy flow of conversation, that Richard and I seemed to retain the transferred impression of having been arrested since dinner and that it was very curious altogether.

It was late before we separated, for when Ada was going at eleven o'clock, Mr. Skimpole went to the piano and rattled hilariously that the best of all ways to lengthen our days was to steal a few hours from night, my dear! It was past twelve before he took his candle and his radiant face out of the room, and I think he might have kept us there, if he had seen fit, until daybreak. Ada and Richard were lingering for a few moments by the fire, wondering whether Mrs. Jellyby had yet finished her dictation for the day, when Mr. Jarndyce, who had been out of the room, returned.

"Oh, dear me, what's this, what's this!" he said, rubbing his head and walking about with his good-humoured vexation. "What's this they tell me? Rick, my boy, Esther, my dear, what have you been doing? Why did you do it? How could you do it? How much apiece was it? The wind's round again. I feel it all over me!"

We neither of us quite knew what to answer.

"Come, Rick, come! I must settle this before I sleep. How much are you out of pocket? You two made the money up, you know! Why did you? How could you? Oh, Lord, yes, it's due east—must be!"

"Really, sir," said Richard, "I don't think it would be honourable in me to tell you. Mr. Skimpole relied upon us—"

"Lord bless you, my dear boy! He relies upon everybody!" said Mr. Jarndyce, giving his head a great rub and stopping short.

"Indeed, sir?"

"Everybody! And he'll be in the same scrape again next week!" said Mr. Jarndyce, walking again at a great pace, with a candle in his hand that had

gone out. “He’s always in the same scrape. He was born in the same scrape. I verily believe that the announcement in the newspapers when his mother was confined was ‘On Tuesday last, at her residence in Botheration Buildings, Mrs. Skimpole of a son in difficulties.’”

Richard laughed heartily but added, “Still, sir, I don’t want to shake his confidence or to break his confidence, and if I submit to your better knowledge again, that I ought to keep his secret, I hope you will consider before you press me any more. Of course, if you do press me, sir, I shall know I am wrong and will tell you.”

“Well!” cried Mr. Jarndyce, stopping again, and making several absent endeavours to put his candlestick in his pocket. “I—here! Take it away, my dear. I don’t know what I am about with it; it’s all the wind—invariably has that effect—I won’t press you, Rick; you may be right. But really—to get hold of you and Esther—and to squeeze you like a couple of tender young Saint Michael’s oranges! It’ll blow a gale in the course of the night!”

He was now alternately putting his hands into his pockets as if he were going to keep them there a long time, and taking them out again and vehemently rubbing them all over his head.

I ventured to take this opportunity of hinting that Mr. Skimpole, being in all such matters quite a child—

“Eh, my dear?” said Mr. Jarndyce, catching at the word.

“Being quite a child, sir,” said I, “and so different from other people—”

“You are right!” said Mr. Jarndyce, brightening. “Your woman’s wit hits the mark. He is a child—an absolute child. I told you he was a child, you know, when I first mentioned him.”

Certainly! Certainly! we said.

“And he IS a child. Now, isn’t he?” asked Mr. Jarndyce, brightening more and more.

He was indeed, we said.

“When you come to think of it, it’s the height of childishness in you—I mean me—” said Mr. Jarndyce, “to regard him for a moment as a man. You can’t make HIM responsible. The idea of Harold Skimpole with designs or plans, or knowledge of consequences! Ha, ha, ha!”

It was so delicious to see the clouds about his bright face clearing, and to see him so heartily pleased, and to know, as it was impossible not to know, that the source of his pleasure was the goodness which was tortured by

condemning, or mistrusting, or secretly accusing any one, that I saw the tears in Ada's eyes, while she echoed his laugh, and felt them in my own.

"Why, what a cod's head and shoulders I am," said Mr. Jarndyce, "to require reminding of it! The whole business shows the child from beginning to end. Nobody but a child would have thought of singling YOU two out for parties in the affair! Nobody but a child would have thought of YOUR having the money! If it had been a thousand pounds, it would have been just the same!" said Mr. Jarndyce with his whole face in a glow.

We all confirmed it from our night's experience.

"To be sure, to be sure!" said Mr. Jarndyce. "However, Rick, Esther, and you too, Ada, for I don't know that even your little purse is safe from his inexperience—I must have a promise all round that nothing of this sort shall ever be done any more. No advances! Not even sixpences."

We all promised faithfully, Richard with a merry glance at me touching his pocket as if to remind me that there was no danger of OUR transgressing.

"As to Skimpole," said Mr. Jarndyce, "a habitable doll's house with good board and a few tin people to get into debt with and borrow money of would set the boy up in life. He is in a child's sleep by this time, I suppose; it's time I should take my craftier head to my more worldly pillow. Good night, my dears. God bless you!"

He peeped in again, with a smiling face, before we had lighted our candles, and said, "Oh! I have been looking at the weather-cock. I find it was a false alarm about the wind. It's in the south!" And went away singing to himself.

Ada and I agreed, as we talked together for a little while upstairs, that this caprice about the wind was a fiction and that he used the pretence to account for any disappointment he could not conceal, rather than he would blame the real cause of it or disparage or depreciate any one. We thought this very characteristic of his eccentric gentleness and of the difference between him and those petulant people who make the weather and the winds (particularly that unlucky wind which he had chosen for such a different purpose) the stalking-horses of their splenetic and gloomy humours.

Indeed, so much affection for him had been added in this one evening to my gratitude that I hoped I already began to understand him through that mingled feeling. Any seeming inconsistencies in Mr. Skimpole or in Mrs.

Jellyby I could not expect to be able to reconcile, having so little experience or practical knowledge. Neither did I try, for my thoughts were busy when I was alone, with Ada and Richard and with the confidence I had seemed to receive concerning them. My fancy, made a little wild by the wind perhaps, would not consent to be all unselfish, either, though I would have persuaded it to be so if I could. It wandered back to my godmother's house and came along the intervening track, raising up shadowy speculations which had sometimes trembled there in the dark as to what knowledge Mr. Jarndyce had of my earliest history—even as to the possibility of his being my father, though that idle dream was quite gone now.

It was all gone now, I remembered, getting up from the fire. It was not for me to muse over bygones, but to act with a cheerful spirit and a grateful heart. So I said to myself, "Esther, Esther, Esther! Duty, my dear!" and gave my little basket of housekeeping keys such a shake that they sounded like little bells and rang me hopefully to bed.

CHAPTER VII

The Ghost’s Walk

WHILE ESTHER SLEEPS, AND while Esther wakes, it is still wet weather down at the place in Lincolnshire. The rain is ever falling—drip, drip, drip—by day and night upon the broad flagged terrace-pavement, the Ghost’s Walk. The weather is so very bad down in Lincolnshire that the liveliest imagination can scarcely apprehend its ever being fine again. Not that there is any superabundant life of imagination on the spot, for Sir Leicester is not here (and, truly, even if he were, would not do much for it in that particular), but is in Paris with my Lady; and solitude, with dusky wings, sits brooding upon Chesney Wold.

There may be some motions of fancy among the lower animals at Chesney Wold. The horses in the stables—the long stables in a barren, red-brick court-yard, where there is a great bell in a turret, and a clock with a large face, which the pigeons who live near it and who love to perch upon its shoulders seem to be always consulting—THEY may contemplate some mental pictures of fine weather on occasions, and may be better artists at them than the grooms. The old roan, so famous for cross-country work, turning his large eyeball to the grated window near his rack, may remember the fresh leaves that glisten there at other times and the scents that stream in, and may have a fine run with the hounds, while the human helper, clearing out the next stall, never stirs beyond his pitchfork and birch-broom. The grey, whose place is opposite the door and who with an impatient rattle of his halter pricks his ears and turns his head so wistfully when it is opened, and to whom the opener says, “Woa grey, then, steady! Noabody wants you to-day!” may know it quite as well as the man. The whole seemingly monotonous and uncompanionable half-dozen, stabled together, may pass the long wet hours when the door is shut in livelier communication than is held in the servants’ hall or at the Dedlock Arms, or may even beguile the time by improving (perhaps corrupting) the pony in the loose-box in the corner.

So the mastiff, dozing in his kennel in the court-yard with his large head on his paws, may think of the hot sunshine when the shadows of the stable-buildings tire his patience out by changing and leave him at one time of the day no broader refuge than the shadow of his own house, where he sits on end, panting and growling short, and very much wanting something to worry besides himself and his chain. So now, half-waking and all-winking, he may recall the house full of company, the coach-houses full of vehicles, the stables full of horses, and the out-buildings full of attendants upon horses, until he is undecided about the present and comes forth to see how it is. Then, with that impatient shake of himself, he may growl in the spirit, "Rain, rain, rain! Nothing but rain—and no family here!" as he goes in again and lies down with a gloomy yawn.

So with the dogs in the kennel-buildings across the park, who have their restless fits and whose doleful voices when the wind has been very obstinate have even made it known in the house itself—upstairs, downstairs, and in my Lady's chamber. They may hunt the whole country-side, while the raindrops are pattering round their inactivity. So the rabbits with their self-betraying tails, frisking in and out of holes at roots of trees, may be lively with ideas of the breezy days when their ears are blown about or of those seasons of interest when there are sweet young plants to gnaw. The turkey in the poultry-yard, always troubled with a class-grievance (probably Christmas), may be reminiscent of that summer morning wrongfully taken from him when he got into the lane among the felled trees, where there was a barn and barley. The discontented goose, who stoops to pass under the old gateway, twenty feet high, may gabble out, if we only knew it, a waddling preference for weather when the gateway casts its shadow on the ground.

Be this as it may, there is not much fancy otherwise stirring at Chesney Wold. If there be a little at any odd moment, it goes, like a little noise in that old echoing place, a long way and usually leads off to ghosts and mystery.

It has rained so hard and rained so long down in Lincolnshire that Mrs. Rouncewell, the old housekeeper at Chesney Wold, has several times taken off her spectacles and cleaned them to make certain that the drops were not upon the glasses. Mrs. Rouncewell might have been sufficiently assured by hearing the rain, but that she is rather deaf, which nothing will induce her to believe. She is a fine old lady, handsome, stately, wonderfully neat, and has

such a back and such a stomacher that if her stays should turn out when she dies to have been a broad old-fashioned family fire-grate, nobody who knows her would have cause to be surprised. Weather affects Mrs. Rouncewell little. The house is there in all weathers, and the house, as she expresses it, “is what she looks at.” She sits in her room (in a side passage on the ground floor, with an arched window commanding a smooth quadrangle, adorned at regular intervals with smooth round trees and smooth round blocks of stone, as if the trees were going to play at bowls with the stones), and the whole house reposes on her mind. She can open it on occasion and be busy and fluttered, but it is shut up now and lies on the breadth of Mrs. Rouncewell’s iron-bound bosom in a majestic sleep.

It is the next difficult thing to an impossibility to imagine Chesney Wold without Mrs. Rouncewell, but she has only been here fifty years. Ask her how long, this rainy day, and she shall answer “fifty year, three months, and a fortnight, by the blessing of heaven, if I live till Tuesday.” Mr. Rouncewell died some time before the decease of the pretty fashion of pig-tails, and modestly hid his own (if he took it with him) in a corner of the churchyard in the park near the mouldy porch. He was born in the market-town, and so was his young widow. Her progress in the family began in the time of the last Sir Leicester and originated in the still-room.

The present representative of the Dedlocks is an excellent master. He supposes all his dependents to be utterly bereft of individual characters, intentions, or opinions, and is persuaded that he was born to supersede the necessity of their having any. If he were to make a discovery to the contrary, he would be simply stunned—would never recover himself, most likely, except to gasp and die. But he is an excellent master still, holding it a part of his state to be so. He has a great liking for Mrs. Rouncewell; he says she is a most respectable, creditable woman. He always shakes hands with her when he comes down to Chesney Wold and when he goes away; and if he were very ill, or if he were knocked down by accident, or run over, or placed in any situation expressive of a Dedlock at a disadvantage, he would say if he could speak, “Leave me, and send Mrs. Rouncewell here!” feeling his dignity, at such a pass, safer with her than with anybody else.

Mrs. Rouncewell has known trouble. She has had two sons, of whom the younger ran wild, and went for a soldier, and never came back. Even to this hour, Mrs. Rouncewell’s calm hands lose their composure when she speaks

of him, and unfolding themselves from her stomacher, hover about her in an agitated manner as she says what a likely lad, what a fine lad, what a gay, good-humoured, clever lad he was! Her second son would have been provided for at Chesney Wold and would have been made steward in due season, but he took, when he was a schoolboy, to constructing steam-engines out of saucepans and setting birds to draw their own water with the least possible amount of labour, so assisting them with artful contrivance of hydraulic pressure that a thirsty canary had only, in a literal sense, to put his shoulder to the wheel and the job was done. This propensity gave Mrs. Rouncewell great uneasiness. She felt it with a mother's anguish to be a move in the Wat Tyler direction, well knowing that Sir Leicester had that general impression of an aptitude for any art to which smoke and a tall chimney might be considered essential. But the doomed young rebel (otherwise a mild youth, and very persevering), showing no sign of grace as he got older but, on the contrary, constructing a model of a power-loom, she was fain, with many tears, to mention his backslidings to the baronet. "Mrs. Rouncewell," said Sir Leicester, "I can never consent to argue, as you know, with any one on any subject. You had better get rid of your boy; you had better get him into some Works. The iron country farther north is, I suppose, the congenial direction for a boy with these tendencies." Farther north he went, and farther north he grew up; and if Sir Leicester Dedlock ever saw him when he came to Chesney Wold to visit his mother, or ever thought of him afterwards, it is certain that he only regarded him as one of a body of some odd thousand conspirators, swarthy and grim, who were in the habit of turning out by torchlight two or three nights in the week for unlawful purposes.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Rouncewell's son has, in the course of nature and art, grown up, and established himself, and married, and called unto him Mrs. Rouncewell's grandson, who, being out of his apprenticeship, and home from a journey in far countries, whither he was sent to enlarge his knowledge and complete his preparations for the venture of this life, stands leaning against the chimney-piece this very day in Mrs. Rouncewell's room at Chesney Wold.

"And, again and again, I am glad to see you, Watt! And, once again, I am glad to see you, Watt!" says Mrs. Rouncewell. "You are a fine young fellow. You are like your poor uncle George. Ah!" Mrs. Rouncewell's hands

unquiet, as usual, on this reference.

“They say I am like my father, grandmother.”

“Like him, also, my dear—but most like your poor uncle George! And your dear father.” Mrs. Rouncewell folds her hands again. “He is well?”

“Thriving, grandmother, in every way.”

“I am thankful!” Mrs. Rouncewell is fond of her son but has a plaintive feeling towards him, much as if he were a very honourable soldier who had gone over to the enemy.

“He is quite happy?” says she.

“Quite.”

“I am thankful! So he has brought you up to follow in his ways and has sent you into foreign countries and the like? Well, he knows best. There may be a world beyond Chesney Wold that I don’t understand. Though I am not young, either. And I have seen a quantity of good company too!”

“Grandmother,” says the young man, changing the subject, “what a very pretty girl that was I found with you just now. You called her Rosa?”

“Yes, child. She is daughter of a widow in the village. Maids are so hard to teach, now-a-days, that I have put her about me young. She’s an apt scholar and will do well. She shows the house already, very pretty. She lives with me at my table here.”

“I hope I have not driven her away?”

“She supposes we have family affairs to speak about, I dare say. She is very modest. It is a fine quality in a young woman. And scarcer,” says Mrs. Rouncewell, expanding her stomacher to its utmost limits, “than it formerly was!”

The young man inclines his head in acknowledgment of the precepts of experience. Mrs. Rouncewell listens.

“Wheels!” says she. They have long been audible to the younger ears of her companion. “What wheels on such a day as this, for gracious sake?”

After a short interval, a tap at the door. “Come in!” A dark-eyed, dark-haired, shy, village beauty comes in—so fresh in her rosy and yet delicate bloom that the drops of rain which have beaten on her hair look like the dew upon a flower fresh gathered.

“What company is this, Rosa?” says Mrs. Rouncewell.

“It’s two young men in a gig, ma’am, who want to see the house—yes, and if you please, I told them so!” in quick reply to a gesture of dissent

from the housekeeper. “I went to the hall-door and told them it was the wrong day and the wrong hour, but the young man who was driving took off his hat in the wet and begged me to bring this card to you.”

“Read it, my dear Watt,” says the housekeeper.

Rosa is so shy as she gives it to him that they drop it between them and almost knock their foreheads together as they pick it up. Rosa is shyer than before.

“Mr. Guppy” is all the information the card yields.

“Guppy!” repeats Mrs. Rouncewell, “MR. Guppy! Nonsense, I never heard of him!”

“If you please, he told ME that!” says Rosa. “But he said that he and the other young gentleman came from London only last night by the mail, on business at the magistrates’ meeting, ten miles off, this morning, and that as their business was soon over, and they had heard a great deal said of Chesney Wold, and really didn’t know what to do with themselves, they had come through the wet to see it. They are lawyers. He says he is not in Mr. Tulkinghorn’s office, but he is sure he may make use of Mr. Tulkinghorn’s name if necessary.” Finding, now she leaves off, that she has been making quite a long speech, Rosa is shyer than ever.

Now, Mr. Tulkinghorn is, in a manner, part and parcel of the place, and besides, is supposed to have made Mrs. Rouncewell’s will. The old lady relaxes, consents to the admission of the visitors as a favour, and dismisses Rosa. The grandson, however, being smitten by a sudden wish to see the house himself, proposes to join the party. The grandmother, who is pleased that he should have that interest, accompanies him—though to do him justice, he is exceedingly unwilling to trouble her.

“Much obliged to you, ma’am!” says Mr. Guppy, divesting himself of his wet dreadnought in the hall. “Us London lawyers don’t often get an out, and when we do, we like to make the most of it, you know.”

The old housekeeper, with a gracious severity of deportment, waves her hand towards the great staircase. Mr. Guppy and his friend follow Rosa; Mrs. Rouncewell and her grandson follow them; a young gardener goes before to open the shutters.

As is usually the case with people who go over houses, Mr. Guppy and his friend are dead beat before they have well begun. They straggle about in wrong places, look at wrong things, don’t care for the right things, gape

when more rooms are opened, exhibit profound depression of spirits, and are clearly knocked up. In each successive chamber that they enter, Mrs. Rouncewell, who is as upright as the house itself, rests apart in a window-seat or other such nook and listens with stately approval to Rosa's exposition. Her grandson is so attentive to it that Rosa is shyer than ever—and prettier. Thus they pass on from room to room, raising the pictured Dedlocks for a few brief minutes as the young gardener admits the light, and reconsigning them to their graves as he shuts it out again. It appears to the afflicted Mr. Guppy and his inconsolable friend that there is no end to the Dedlocks, whose family greatness seems to consist in their never having done anything to distinguish themselves for seven hundred years.

Even the long drawing-room of Chesney Wold cannot revive Mr. Guppy's spirits. He is so low that he droops on the threshold and has hardly strength of mind to enter. But a portrait over the chimney-piece, painted by the fashionable artist of the day, acts upon him like a charm. He recovers in a moment. He stares at it with uncommon interest; he seems to be fixed and fascinated by it.

"Dear me!" says Mr. Guppy. "Who's that?"

"The picture over the fire-place," says Rosa, "is the portrait of the present Lady Dedlock. It is considered a perfect likeness, and the best work of the master."

"Blest," says Mr. Guppy, staring in a kind of dismay at his friend, "if I can ever have seen her. Yet I know her! Has the picture been engraved, miss?"

"The picture has never been engraved. Sir Leicester has always refused permission."

"Well!" says Mr. Guppy in a low voice. "I'll be shot if it ain't very curious how well I know that picture! So that's Lady Dedlock, is it!"

"The picture on the right is the present Sir Leicester Dedlock. The picture on the left is his father, the late Sir Leicester."

Mr. Guppy has no eyes for either of these magnates. "It's unaccountable to me," he says, still staring at the portrait, "how well I know that picture! I'm dashed," adds Mr. Guppy, looking round, "if I don't think I must have had a dream of that picture, you know!"

As no one present takes any especial interest in Mr. Guppy's dreams, the probability is not pursued. But he still remains so absorbed by the portrait

that he stands immovable before it until the young gardener has closed the shutters, when he comes out of the room in a dazed state that is an odd though a sufficient substitute for interest and follows into the succeeding rooms with a confused stare, as if he were looking everywhere for Lady Dedlock again.

He sees no more of her. He sees her rooms, which are the last shown, as being very elegant, and he looks out of the windows from which she looked out, not long ago, upon the weather that bored her to death. All things have an end, even houses that people take infinite pains to see and are tired of before they begin to see them. He has come to the end of the sight, and the fresh village beauty to the end of her description; which is always this: “The terrace below is much admired. It is called, from an old story in the family, the Ghost’s Walk.”

“No?” says Mr. Guppy, greedily curious. “What’s the story, miss? Is it anything about a picture?”

“Pray tell us the story,” says Watt in a half whisper.

“I don’t know it, sir.” Rosa is shyer than ever.

“It is not related to visitors; it is almost forgotten,” says the housekeeper, advancing. “It has never been more than a family anecdote.”

“You’ll excuse my asking again if it has anything to do with a picture, ma’am,” observes Mr. Guppy, “because I do assure you that the more I think of that picture the better I know it, without knowing how I know it!”

The story has nothing to do with a picture; the housekeeper can guarantee that. Mr. Guppy is obliged to her for the information and is, moreover, generally obliged. He retires with his friend, guided down another staircase by the young gardener, and presently is heard to drive away. It is now dusk. Mrs. Rouncewell can trust to the discretion of her two young hearers and may tell THEM how the terrace came to have that ghostly name.

She seats herself in a large chair by the fast-darkening window and tells them: “In the wicked days, my dears, of King Charles the First—I mean, of course, in the wicked days of the rebels who leagued themselves against that excellent king—Sir Morbury Dedlock was the owner of Chesney Wold. Whether there was any account of a ghost in the family before those days, I can’t say. I should think it very likely indeed.”

Mrs. Rouncewell holds this opinion because she considers that a family

of such antiquity and importance has a right to a ghost. She regards a ghost as one of the privileges of the upper classes, a genteel distinction to which the common people have no claim.

"Sir Morbury Dedlock," says Mrs. Rouncewell, "was, I have no occasion to say, on the side of the blessed martyr. But it IS supposed that his Lady, who had none of the family blood in her veins, favoured the bad cause. It is said that she had relations among King Charles's enemies, that she was in correspondence with them, and that she gave them information. When any of the country gentlemen who followed his Majesty's cause met here, it is said that my Lady was always nearer to the door of their council-room than they supposed. Do you hear a sound like a footstep passing along the terrace, Watt?"

Rosa draws nearer to the housekeeper.

"I hear the rain-drip on the stones," replies the young man, "and I hear a curious echo—I suppose an echo—which is very like a halting step."

The housekeeper gravely nods and continues: "Partly on account of this division between them, and partly on other accounts, Sir Morbury and his Lady led a troubled life. She was a lady of a haughty temper. They were not well suited to each other in age or character, and they had no children to moderate between them. After her favourite brother, a young gentleman, was killed in the civil wars (by Sir Morbury's near kinsman), her feeling was so violent that she hated the race into which she had married. When the Dedlocks were about to ride out from Chesney Wold in the king's cause, she is supposed to have more than once stolen down into the stables in the dead of night and lamed their horses; and the story is that once at such an hour, her husband saw her gliding down the stairs and followed her into the stall where his own favourite horse stood. There he seized her by the wrist, and in a struggle or in a fall or through the horse being frightened and lashing out, she was lamed in the hip and from that hour began to pine away."

The housekeeper has dropped her voice to a little more than a whisper.

"She had been a lady of a handsome figure and a noble carriage. She never complained of the change; she never spoke to any one of being crippled or of being in pain, but day by day she tried to walk upon the terrace, and with the help of the stone balustrade, went up and down, up and down, up and down, in sun and shadow, with greater difficulty every day.

At last, one afternoon her husband (to whom she had never, on any persuasion, opened her lips since that night), standing at the great south window, saw her drop upon the pavement. He hastened down to raise her, but she repulsed him as he bent over her, and looking at him fixedly and coldly, said, ‘I will die here where I have walked. And I will walk here, though I am in my grave. I will walk here until the pride of this house is humbled. And when calamity or when disgrace is coming to it, let the Dedlocks listen for my step!’”

Watt looks at Rosa. Rosa in the deepening gloom looks down upon the ground, half frightened and half shy.

“There and then she died. And from those days,” says Mrs. Rouncewell, “the name has come down—the Ghost’s Walk. If the tread is an echo, it is an echo that is only heard after dark, and is often unheard for a long while together. But it comes back from time to time; and so sure as there is sickness or death in the family, it will be heard then.”

“And disgrace, grandmother—” says Watt.

“Disgrace never comes to Chesney Wold,” returns the housekeeper.

Her grandson apologizes with “True. True.”

“That is the story. Whatever the sound is, it is a worrying sound,” says Mrs. Rouncewell, getting up from her chair; “and what is to be noticed in it is that it MUST BE HEARD. My Lady, who is afraid of nothing, admits that when it is there, it must be heard. You cannot shut it out. Watt, there is a tall French clock behind you (placed there, ’a purpose) that has a loud beat when it is in motion and can play music. You understand how those things are managed?”

“Pretty well, grandmother, I think.”

“Set it a-going.”

Watt sets it a-going—music and all.

“Now, come hither,” says the housekeeper. “Hither, child, towards my Lady’s pillow. I am not sure that it is dark enough yet, but listen! Can you hear the sound upon the terrace, through the music, and the beat, and everything?”

“I certainly can!”

“So my Lady says.”

CHAPTER VIII

Covering a Multitude of Sins

IT WAS INTERESTING WHEN I dressed before daylight to peep out of window, where my candles were reflected in the black panes like two beacons, and finding all beyond still enshrouded in the indistinctness of last night, to watch how it turned out when the day came on. As the prospect gradually revealed itself and disclosed the scene over which the wind had wandered in the dark, like my memory over my life, I had a pleasure in discovering the unknown objects that had been around me in my sleep. At first they were faintly discernible in the mist, and above them the later stars still glimmered. That pale interval over, the picture began to enlarge and fill up so fast that at every new peep I could have found enough to look at for an hour. Imperceptibly my candles became the only incongruous part of the morning, the dark places in my room all melted away, and the day shone bright upon a cheerful landscape, prominent in which the old Abbey Church, with its massive tower, threw a softer train of shadow on the view than seemed compatible with its rugged character. But so from rough outsides (I hope I have learnt), serene and gentle influences often proceed.

Every part of the house was in such order, and every one was so attentive to me, that I had no trouble with my two bunches of keys, though what with trying to remember the contents of each little store-room drawer and cupboard; and what with making notes on a slate about jams, and pickles, and preserves, and bottles, and glass, and china, and a great many other things; and what with being generally a methodical, old-maidish sort of foolish little person, I was so busy that I could not believe it was breakfast-time when I heard the bell ring. Away I ran, however, and made tea, as I had already been installed into the responsibility of the tea-pot; and then, as they were all rather late and nobody was down yet, I thought I would take a peep at the garden and get some knowledge of that too. I found it quite a delightful place—in front, the pretty avenue and drive by which we had approached (and where, by the by, we had cut up the gravel so terribly with

our wheels that I asked the gardener to roll it); at the back, the flower-garden, with my darling at her window up there, throwing it open to smile out at me, as if she would have kissed me from that distance. Beyond the flower-garden was a kitchen-garden, and then a paddock, and then a snug little rick-yard, and then a dear little farm-yard. As to the house itself, with its three peaks in the roof; its various-shaped windows, some so large, some so small, and all so pretty; its trellis-work, against the south-front for roses and honey-suckle, and its homely, comfortable, welcoming look—it was, as Ada said when she came out to meet me with her arm through that of its master, worthy of her cousin John, a bold thing to say, though he only pinched her dear cheek for it.

Mr. Skimpole was as agreeable at breakfast as he had been overnight. There was honey on the table, and it led him into a discourse about bees. He had no objection to honey, he said (and I should think he had not, for he seemed to like it), but he protested against the overweening assumptions of bees. He didn't at all see why the busy bee should be proposed as a model to him; he supposed the bee liked to make honey, or he wouldn't do it—nobody asked him. It was not necessary for the bee to make such a merit of his tastes. If every confectioner went buzzing about the world banging against everything that came in his way and egotistically calling upon everybody to take notice that he was going to his work and must not be interrupted, the world would be quite an unsupportable place. Then, after all, it was a ridiculous position to be smoked out of your fortune with brimstone as soon as you had made it. You would have a very mean opinion of a Manchester man if he spun cotton for no other purpose. He must say he thought a drone the embodiment of a pleasanter and wiser idea. The drone said unaffectedly, "You will excuse me; I really cannot attend to the shop! I find myself in a world in which there is so much to see and so short a time to see it in that I must take the liberty of looking about me and begging to be provided for by somebody who doesn't want to look about him." This appeared to Mr. Skimpole to be the drone philosophy, and he thought it a very good philosophy, always supposing the drone to be willing to be on good terms with the bee, which, so far as he knew, the easy fellow always was, if the consequential creature would only let him, and not be so conceited about his honey!

He pursued this fancy with the lightest foot over a variety of ground and

made us all merry, though again he seemed to have as serious a meaning in what he said as he was capable of having. I left them still listening to him when I withdrew to attend to my new duties. They had occupied me for some time, and I was passing through the passages on my return with my basket of keys on my arm when Mr. Jarndyce called me into a small room next his bed-chamber, which I found to be in part a little library of books and papers and in part quite a little museum of his boots and shoes and hat-boxes.

"Sit down, my dear," said Mr. Jarndyce. "This, you must know, is the growlery. When I am out of humour, I come and growl here."

"You must be here very seldom, sir," said I.

"Oh, you don't know me!" he returned. "When I am deceived or disappointed in—the wind, and it's easterly, I take refuge here. The growlery is the best-used room in the house. You are not aware of half my humours yet. My dear, how you are trembling!"

I could not help it; I tried very hard, but being alone with that benevolent presence, and meeting his kind eyes, and feeling so happy and so honoured there, and my heart so full—I kissed his hand. I don't know what I said, or even that I spoke. He was disconcerted and walked to the window; I almost believed with an intention of jumping out, until he turned and I was reassured by seeing in his eyes what he had gone there to hide. He gently patted me on the head, and I sat down.

"There! There!" he said. "That's over. Pooh! Don't be foolish."

"It shall not happen again, sir," I returned, "but at first it is difficult—"

"Nonsense!" he said. "It's easy, easy. Why not? I hear of a good little orphan girl without a protector, and I take it into my head to be that protector. She grows up, and more than justifies my good opinion, and I remain her guardian and her friend. What is there in all this? So, so! Now, we have cleared off old scores, and I have before me thy pleasant, trusting, trusty face again."

I said to myself, "Esther, my dear, you surprise me! This really is not what I expected of you!" And it had such a good effect that I folded my hands upon my basket and quite recovered myself. Mr. Jarndyce, expressing his approval in his face, began to talk to me as confidentially as if I had been in the habit of conversing with him every morning for I don't know how long. I almost felt as if I had.

“Of course, Esther,” he said, “you don’t understand this Chancery business?”

And of course I shook my head.

“I don’t know who does,” he returned. “The lawyers have twisted it into such a state of bedevilment that the original merits of the case have long disappeared from the face of the earth. It’s about a will and the trusts under a will—or it was once. It’s about nothing but costs now. We are always appearing, and disappearing, and swearing, and interrogating, and filing, and cross-filing, and arguing, and sealing, and motioning, and referring, and reporting, and revolving about the Lord Chancellor and all his satellites, and equitably waltzing ourselves off to dusty death, about costs. That’s the great question. All the rest, by some extraordinary means, has melted away.”

“But it was, sir,” said I, to bring him back, for he began to rub his head, “about a will?”

“Why, yes, it was about a will when it was about anything,” he returned. “A certain Jarndyce, in an evil hour, made a great fortune, and made a great will. In the question how the trusts under that will are to be administered, the fortune left by the will is squandered away; the legatees under the will are reduced to such a miserable condition that they would be sufficiently punished if they had committed an enormous crime in having money left them, and the will itself is made a dead letter. All through the deplorable cause, everything that everybody in it, except one man, knows already is referred to that only one man who don’t know, it to find out—all through the deplorable cause, everybody must have copies, over and over again, of everything that has accumulated about it in the way of cartloads of papers (or must pay for them without having them, which is the usual course, for nobody wants them) and must go down the middle and up again through such an infernal country-dance of costs and fees and nonsense and corruption as was never dreamed of in the wildest visions of a witch’s Sabbath. Equity sends questions to law, law sends questions back to equity; law finds it can’t do this, equity finds it can’t do that; neither can so much as say it can’t do anything, without this solicitor instructing and this counsel appearing for A, and that solicitor instructing and that counsel appearing for B; and so on through the whole alphabet, like the history of the apple pie. And thus, through years and years, and lives and lives, everything goes on, constantly beginning over and over again, and nothing ever ends. And we

can’t get out of the suit on any terms, for we are made parties to it, and MUST BE parties to it, whether we like it or not. But it won’t do to think of it! When my great uncle, poor Tom Jarndyce, began to think of it, it was the beginning of the end!”

“The Mr. Jarndyce, sir, whose story I have heard?”

He nodded gravely. “I was his heir, and this was his house, Esther. When I came here, it was bleak indeed. He had left the signs of his misery upon it.”

“How changed it must be now!” I said.

“It had been called, before his time, the Peaks. He gave it its present name and lived here shut up, day and night poring over the wicked heaps of papers in the suit and hoping against hope to disentangle it from its mystification and bring it to a close. In the meantime, the place became dilapidated, the wind whistled through the cracked walls, the rain fell through the broken roof, the weeds choked the passage to the rotting door. When I brought what remained of him home here, the brains seemed to me to have been blown out of the house too, it was so shattered and ruined.”

He walked a little to and fro after saying this to himself with a shudder, and then looked at me, and brightened, and came and sat down again with his hands in his pockets.

“I told you this was the growlery, my dear. Where was I?”

I reminded him, at the hopeful change he had made in Bleak House.

“Bleak House; true. There is, in that city of London there, some property of ours which is much at this day what Bleak House was then; I say property of ours, meaning of the suit’s, but I ought to call it the property of costs, for costs is the only power on earth that will ever get anything out of it now or will ever know it for anything but an eyesore and a heartsore. It is a street of perishing blind houses, with their eyes stoned out, without a pane of glass, without so much as a window-frame, with the bare blank shutters tumbling from their hinges and falling asunder, the iron rails peeling away in flakes of rust, the chimneys sinking in, the stone steps to every door (and every door might be death’s door) turning stagnant green, the very crutches on which the ruins are propped decaying. Although Bleak House was not in Chancery, its master was, and it was stamped with the same seal. These are the Great Seal’s impressions, my dear, all over England—the children know them!”

“How changed it is!” I said again.

“Why, so it is,” he answered much more cheerfully; “and it is wisdom in you to keep me to the bright side of the picture.” (The idea of my wisdom!) “These are things I never talk about or even think about, excepting in the growlery here. If you consider it right to mention them to Rick and Ada,” looking seriously at me, “you can. I leave it to your discretion, Esther.”

“I hope, sir—” said I.

“I think you had better call me guardian, my dear.”

I felt that I was choking again—I taxed myself with it, “Esther, now, you know you are!”—when he feigned to say this slightly, as if it were a whim instead of a thoughtful tenderness. But I gave the housekeeping keys the least shake in the world as a reminder to myself, and folding my hands in a still more determined manner on the basket, looked at him quietly.

“I hope, guardian,” said I, “that you may not trust too much to my discretion. I hope you may not mistake me. I am afraid it will be a disappointment to you to know that I am not clever, but it really is the truth, and you would soon find it out if I had not the honesty to confess it.”

He did not seem at all disappointed; quite the contrary. He told me, with a smile all over his face, that he knew me very well indeed and that I was quite clever enough for him.

“I hope I may turn out so,” said I, “but I am much afraid of it, guardian.”

“You are clever enough to be the good little woman of our lives here, my dear,” he returned playfully; “the little old woman of the child’s (I don’t mean Skimpole’s) rhyme:

> “‘Little old woman, and whither so high?’
> ‘To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky.’

“You will sweep them so neatly out of OUR sky in the course of your housekeeping, Esther, that one of these days we shall have to abandon the growlery and nail up the door.”

This was the beginning of my being called Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs. Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort that my own name soon became quite lost among them.

“However,” said Mr. Jarndyce, “to return to our gossip. Here’s Rick, a

fine young fellow full of promise. What's to be done with him?"

Oh, my goodness, the idea of asking my advice on such a point!

"Here he is, Esther," said Mr. Jarndyce, comfortably putting his hands into his pockets and stretching out his legs. "He must have a profession; he must make some choice for himself. There will be a world more wiglomeration about it, I suppose, but it must be done."

"More what, guardian?" said I.

"More wiglomeration," said he. "It's the only name I know for the thing. He is a ward in Chancery, my dear. Kenge and Carboy will have something to say about it; Master Somebody—a sort of ridiculous sexton, digging graves for the merits of causes in a back room at the end of Quality Court, Chancery Lane—will have something to say about it; counsel will have something to say about it; the Chancellor will have something to say about it; the satellites will have something to say about it; they will all have to be handsomely feed, all round, about it; the whole thing will be vastly ceremonious, wordy, unsatisfactory, and expensive, and I call it, in general, wiglomeration. How mankind ever came to be afflicted with wiglomeration, or for whose sins these young people ever fell into a pit of it, I don't know; so it is."

He began to rub his head again and to hint that he felt the wind. But it was a delightful instance of his kindness towards me that whether he rubbed his head, or walked about, or did both, his face was sure to recover its benignant expression as it looked at mine; and he was sure to turn comfortable again and put his hands in his pockets and stretch out his legs.

"Perhaps it would be best, first of all," said I, "to ask Mr. Richard what he inclines to himself."

"Exactly so," he returned. "That's what I mean! You know, just accustom yourself to talk it over, with your tact and in your quiet way, with him and Ada, and see what you all make of it. We are sure to come at the heart of the matter by your means, little woman."

I really was frightened at the thought of the importance I was attaining and the number of things that were being confided to me. I had not meant this at all; I had meant that he should speak to Richard. But of course I said nothing in reply except that I would do my best, though I feared (I really felt it necessary to repeat this) that he thought me much more sagacious than I was. At which my guardian only laughed the pleasantest laugh I ever

heard.

"Come!" he said, rising and pushing back his chair. "I think we may have done with the growlery for one day! Only a concluding word. Esther, my dear, do you wish to ask me anything?"

He looked so attentively at me that I looked attentively at him and felt sure I understood him.

"About myself, sir?" said I.

"Yes."

"Guardian," said I, venturing to put my hand, which was suddenly colder than I could have wished, in his, "nothing! I am quite sure that if there were anything I ought to know or had any need to know, I should not have to ask you to tell it to me. If my whole reliance and confidence were not placed in you, I must have a hard heart indeed. I have nothing to ask you, nothing in the world."

He drew my hand through his arm and we went away to look for Ada. From that hour I felt quite easy with him, quite unreserved, quite content to know no more, quite happy.

We lived, at first, rather a busy life at Bleak House, for we had to become acquainted with many residents in and out of the neighbourhood who knew Mr. Jarndyce. It seemed to Ada and me that everybody knew him who wanted to do anything with anybody else's money. It amazed us when we began to sort his letters and to answer some of them for him in the growlery of a morning to find how the great object of the lives of nearly all his correspondents appeared to be to form themselves into committees for getting in and laying out money. The ladies were as desperate as the gentlemen; indeed, I think they were even more so. They threw themselves into committees in the most impassioned manner and collected subscriptions with a vehemence quite extraordinary. It appeared to us that some of them must pass their whole lives in dealing out subscription-cards to the whole post-office directory—shilling cards, half-crown cards, half-sovereign cards, penny cards. They wanted everything. They wanted wearing apparel, they wanted linen rags, they wanted money, they wanted coals, they wanted soup, they wanted interest, they wanted autographs, they wanted flannel, they wanted whatever Mr. Jarndyce had—or had not. Their objects were as various as their demands. They were going to raise new buildings, they were going to pay off debts on old buildings, they were

going to establish in a picturesque building (engraving of proposed west elevation attached) the Sisterhood of Mediaeval Marys, they were going to give a testimonial to Mrs. Jellyby, they were going to have their secretary's portrait painted and presented to his mother-in-law, whose deep devotion to him was well known, they were going to get up everything, I really believe, from five hundred thousand tracts to an annuity and from a marble monument to a silver tea-pot. They took a multitude of titles. They were the Women of England, the Daughters of Britain, the Sisters of all the cardinal virtues separately, the Females of America, the Ladies of a hundred denominations. They appeared to be always excited about canvassing and electing. They seemed to our poor wits, and according to their own accounts, to be constantly polling people by tens of thousands, yet never bringing their candidates in for anything. It made our heads ache to think, on the whole, what feverish lives they must lead.

Among the ladies who were most distinguished for this rapacious benevolence (if I may use the expression) was a Mrs. Pardiggle, who seemed, as I judged from the number of her letters to Mr. Jarndyce, to be almost as powerful a correspondent as Mrs. Jellyby herself. We observed that the wind always changed when Mrs. Pardiggle became the subject of conversation and that it invariably interrupted Mr. Jarndyce and prevented his going any farther, when he had remarked that there were two classes of charitable people; one, the people who did a little and made a great deal of noise; the other, the people who did a great deal and made no noise at all. We were therefore curious to see Mrs. Pardiggle, suspecting her to be a type of the former class, and were glad when she called one day with her five young sons.

She was a formidable style of lady with spectacles, a prominent nose, and a loud voice, who had the effect of wanting a great deal of room. And she really did, for she knocked down little chairs with her skirts that were quite a great way off. As only Ada and I were at home, we received her timidly, for she seemed to come in like cold weather and to make the little Pardiggles blue as they followed.

"These, young ladies," said Mrs. Pardiggle with great volubility after the first salutations, "are my five boys. You may have seen their names in a printed subscription list (perhaps more than one) in the possession of our esteemed friend Mr. Jarndyce. Egbert, my eldest (twelve), is the boy who

sent out his pocket-money, to the amount of five and threepence, to the Tockahoopo Indians. Oswald, my second (ten and a half), is the child who contributed two and nine-pence to the Great National Smithers Testimonial. Francis, my third (nine), one and sixpence halfpenny; Felix, my fourth (seven), eightpence to the Superannuated Widows; Alfred, my youngest (five), has voluntarily enrolled himself in the Infant Bonds of Joy, and is pledged never, through life, to use tobacco in any form."

We had never seen such dissatisfied children. It was not merely that they were weazened and shrivelled—though they were certainly that too—but they looked absolutely ferocious with discontent. At the mention of the Tockahoopo Indians, I could really have supposed Egbert to be one of the most baleful members of that tribe, he gave me such a savage frown. The face of each child, as the amount of his contribution was mentioned, darkened in a peculiarly vindictive manner, but his was by far the worst. I must except, however, the little recruit into the Infant Bonds of Joy, who was stolidly and evenly miserable.

"You have been visiting, I understand," said Mrs. Pardiggle, "at Mrs. Jellyby's?"

We said yes, we had passed one night there.

"Mrs. Jellyby," pursued the lady, always speaking in the same demonstrative, loud, hard tone, so that her voice impressed my fancy as if it had a sort of spectacles on too—and I may take the opportunity of remarking that her spectacles were made the less engaging by her eyes being what Ada called "choking eyes," meaning very prominent—"Mrs. Jellyby is a benefactor to society and deserves a helping hand. My boys have contributed to the African project—Egbert, one and six, being the entire allowance of nine weeks; Oswald, one and a penny halfpenny, being the same; the rest, according to their little means. Nevertheless, I do not go with Mrs. Jellyby in all things. I do not go with Mrs. Jellyby in her treatment of her young family. It has been noticed. It has been observed that her young family are excluded from participation in the objects to which she is devoted. She may be right, she may be wrong; but, right or wrong, this is not my course with MY young family. I take them everywhere."

I was afterwards convinced (and so was Ada) that from the ill-conditioned eldest child, these words extorted a sharp yell. He turned it off into a yawn, but it began as a yell.

“They attend matins with me (very prettily done) at half-past six o’clock in the morning all the year round, including of course the depth of winter,” said Mrs. Pardiggle rapidly, “and they are with me during the revolving duties of the day. I am a School lady, I am a Visiting lady, I am a Reading lady, I am a Distributing lady; I am on the local Linen Box Committee and many general committees; and my canvassing alone is very extensive—perhaps no one’s more so. But they are my companions everywhere; and by these means they acquire that knowledge of the poor, and that capacity of doing charitable business in general—in short, that taste for the sort of thing—which will render them in after life a service to their neighbours and a satisfaction to themselves. My young family are not frivolous; they expend the entire amount of their allowance in subscriptions, under my direction; and they have attended as many public meetings and listened to as many lectures, orations, and discussions as generally fall to the lot of few grown people. Alfred (five), who, as I mentioned, has of his own election joined the Infant Bonds of Joy, was one of the very few children who manifested consciousness on that occasion after a fervid address of two hours from the chairman of the evening.”

Alfred glowered at us as if he never could, or would, forgive the injury of that night.

“You may have observed, Miss Summerson,” said Mrs. Pardiggle, “in some of the lists to which I have referred, in the possession of our esteemed friend Mr. Jarndyce, that the names of my young family are concluded with the name of O. A. Pardiggle, F.R.S., one pound. That is their father. We usually observe the same routine. I put down my mite first; then my young family enrol their contributions, according to their ages and their little means; and then Mr. Pardiggle brings up the rear. Mr. Pardiggle is happy to throw in his limited donation, under my direction; and thus things are made not only pleasant to ourselves, but, we trust, improving to others.”

Suppose Mr. Pardiggle were to dine with Mr. Jellyby, and suppose Mr. Jellyby were to relieve his mind after dinner to Mr. Pardiggle, would Mr. Pardiggle, in return, make any confidential communication to Mr. Jellyby? I was quite confused to find myself thinking this, but it came into my head.

“You are very pleasantly situated here!” said Mrs. Pardiggle.

We were glad to change the subject, and going to the window, pointed out the beauties of the prospect, on which the spectacles appeared to me to

rest with curious indifference.

“You know Mr. Gusher?” said our visitor.

We were obliged to say that we had not the pleasure of Mr. Gusher’s acquaintance.

“The loss is yours, I assure you,” said Mrs. Pardiggle with her commanding deportment. “He is a very fervid, impassioned speaker—full of fire! Stationed in a waggon on this lawn, now, which, from the shape of the land, is naturally adapted to a public meeting, he would improve almost any occasion you could mention for hours and hours! By this time, young ladies,” said Mrs. Pardiggle, moving back to her chair and overturning, as if by invisible agency, a little round table at a considerable distance with my work-basket on it, “by this time you have found me out, I dare say?”

This was really such a confusing question that Ada looked at me in perfect dismay. As to the guilty nature of my own consciousness after what I had been thinking, it must have been expressed in the colour of my cheeks.

“Found out, I mean,” said Mrs. Pardiggle, “the prominent point in my character. I am aware that it is so prominent as to be discoverable immediately. I lay myself open to detection, I know. Well! I freely admit, I am a woman of business. I love hard work; I enjoy hard work. The excitement does me good. I am so accustomed and inured to hard work that I don’t know what fatigue is.”

We murmured that it was very astonishing and very gratifying, or something to that effect. I don’t think we knew what it was either, but this is what our politeness expressed.

“I do not understand what it is to be tired; you cannot tire me if you try!” said Mrs. Pardiggle. “The quantity of exertion (which is no exertion to me), the amount of business (which I regard as nothing), that I go through sometimes astonishes myself. I have seen my young family, and Mr. Pardiggle, quite worn out with witnessing it, when I may truly say I have been as fresh as a lark!”

If that dark-visaged eldest boy could look more malicious than he had already looked, this was the time when he did it. I observed that he doubled his right fist and delivered a secret blow into the crown of his cap, which was under his left arm.

“This gives me a great advantage when I am making my rounds,” said

Mrs. Pardiggle. “If I find a person unwilling to hear what I have to say, I tell that person directly, ‘I am incapable of fatigue, my good friend, I am never tired, and I mean to go on until I have done.’ It answers admirably! Miss Summerson, I hope I shall have your assistance in my visiting rounds immediately, and Miss Clare’s very soon.”

At first I tried to excuse myself for the present on the general ground of having occupations to attend to which I must not neglect. But as this was an ineffectual protest, I then said, more particularly, that I was not sure of my qualifications. That I was inexperienced in the art of adapting my mind to minds very differently situated, and addressing them from suitable points of view. That I had not that delicate knowledge of the heart which must be essential to such a work. That I had much to learn, myself, before I could teach others, and that I could not confide in my good intentions alone. For these reasons I thought it best to be as useful as I could, and to render what kind services I could to those immediately about me, and to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself. All this I said with anything but confidence, because Mrs. Pardiggle was much older than I, and had great experience, and was so very military in her manners.

“You are wrong, Miss Summerson,” said she, “but perhaps you are not equal to hard work or the excitement of it, and that makes a vast difference. If you would like to see how I go through my work, I am now about—with my young family—to visit a brickmaker in the neighbourhood (a very bad character) and shall be glad to take you with me. Miss Clare also, if she will do me the favour.”

Ada and I interchanged looks, and as we were going out in any case, accepted the offer. When we hastily returned from putting on our bonnets, we found the young family languishing in a corner and Mrs. Pardiggle sweeping about the room, knocking down nearly all the light objects it contained. Mrs. Pardiggle took possession of Ada, and I followed with the family.

Ada told me afterwards that Mrs. Pardiggle talked in the same loud tone (that, indeed, I overheard) all the way to the brickmaker’s about an exciting contest which she had for two or three years waged against another lady relative to the bringing in of their rival candidates for a pension somewhere. There had been a quantity of printing, and promising, and proxying, and polling, and it appeared to have imparted great liveliness to all concerned,

except the pensioners—who were not elected yet.

I am very fond of being confided in by children and am happy in being usually favoured in that respect, but on this occasion it gave me great uneasiness. As soon as we were out of doors, Egbert, with the manner of a little footpad, demanded a shilling of me on the ground that his pocket-money was "boned" from him. On my pointing out the great impropriety of the word, especially in connexion with his parent (for he added sulkily "By her!"), he pinched me and said, "Oh, then! Now! Who are you! YOU wouldn't like it, I think? What does she make a sham for, and pretend to give me money, and take it away again? Why do you call it my allowance, and never let me spend it?" These exasperating questions so inflamed his mind and the minds of Oswald and Francis that they all pinched me at once, and in a dreadfully expert way—screwing up such little pieces of my arms that I could hardly forbear crying out. Felix, at the same time, stamped upon my toes. And the Bond of Joy, who on account of always having the whole of his little income anticipated stood in fact pledged to abstain from cakes as well as tobacco, so swelled with grief and rage when we passed a pastry-cook's shop that he terrified me by becoming purple. I never underwent so much, both in body and mind, in the course of a walk with young people as from these unnaturally constrained children when they paid me the compliment of being natural.

I was glad when we came to the brickmaker's house, though it was one of a cluster of wretched hovels in a brick-field, with pigsties close to the broken windows and miserable little gardens before the doors growing nothing but stagnant pools. Here and there an old tub was put to catch the droppings of rain-water from a roof, or they were banked up with mud into a little pond like a large dirt-pie. At the doors and windows some men and women lounged or prowled about, and took little notice of us except to laugh to one another or to say something as we passed about gentlefolks minding their own business and not troubling their heads and muddying their shoes with coming to look after other people's.

Mrs. Pardiggle, leading the way with a great show of moral determination and talking with much volubility about the untidy habits of the people (though I doubted if the best of us could have been tidy in such a place), conducted us into a cottage at the farthest corner, the ground-floor room of which we nearly filled. Besides ourselves, there were in this damp,

offensive room a woman with a black eye, nursing a poor little gasping baby by the fire; a man, all stained with clay and mud and looking very dissipated, lying at full length on the ground, smoking a pipe; a powerful young man fastening a collar on a dog; and a bold girl doing some kind of washing in very dirty water. They all looked up at us as we came in, and the woman seemed to turn her face towards the fire as if to hide her bruised eye; nobody gave us any welcome.

"Well, my friends," said Mrs. Pardiggle, but her voice had not a friendly sound, I thought; it was much too business-like and systematic. "How do you do, all of you? I am here again. I told you, you couldn't tire me, you know. I am fond of hard work, and am true to my word."

"There an't," growled the man on the floor, whose head rested on his hand as he stared at us, "any more on you to come in, is there?"

"No, my friend," said Mrs. Pardiggle, seating herself on one stool and knocking down another. "We are all here."

"Because I thought there warn't enough of you, perhaps?" said the man, with his pipe between his lips as he looked round upon us.

The young man and the girl both laughed. Two friends of the young man, whom we had attracted to the doorway and who stood there with their hands in their pockets, echoed the laugh noisily.

"You can't tire me, good people," said Mrs. Pardiggle to these latter. "I enjoy hard work, and the harder you make mine, the better I like it."

"Then make it easy for her!" growled the man upon the floor. "I wants it done, and over. I wants a end of these liberties took with my place. I wants an end of being drawed like a badger. Now you're a-going to poll-pry and question according to custom—I know what you're a-going to be up to. Well! You haven't got no occasion to be up to it. I'll save you the trouble. Is my daughter a-washin? Yes, she IS a-washin. Look at the water. Smell it! That's wot we drinks. How do you like it, and what do you think of gin instead! An't my place dirty? Yes, it is dirty—it's nat'rally dirty, and it's nat'rally onwholesome; and we've had five dirty and onwholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for them, and for us besides. Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an't read the little book wot you left. There an't nobody here as knows how to read it; and if there wos, it wouldn't be suitable to me. It's a book fit for a babby, and I'm not a babby. If you was to leave me a doll, I shouldn't nuss it. How have I

been conducting of myself? Why, I've been drunk for three days; and I'da been drunk four if I'da had the money. Don't I never mean for to go to church? No, I don't never mean for to go to church. I shouldn't be expected there, if I did; the beadle's too gen-teel for me. And how did my wife get that black eye? Why, I give it her; and if she says I didn't, she's a lie!"

He had pulled his pipe out of his mouth to say all this, and he now turned over on his other side and smoked again. Mrs. Pardiggle, who had been regarding him through her spectacles with a forcible composure, calculated, I could not help thinking, to increase his antagonism, pulled out a good book as if it were a constable's staff and took the whole family into custody. I mean into religious custody, of course; but she really did it as if she were an inexorable moral policeman carrying them all off to a station-house.

Ada and I were very uncomfortable. We both felt intrusive and out of place, and we both thought that Mrs. Pardiggle would have got on infinitely better if she had not had such a mechanical way of taking possession of people. The children sulked and stared; the family took no notice of us whatever, except when the young man made the dog bark, which he usually did when Mrs. Pardiggle was most emphatic. We both felt painfully sensible that between us and these people there was an iron barrier which could not be removed by our new friend. By whom or how it could be removed, we did not know, but we knew that. Even what she read and said seemed to us to be ill-chosen for such auditors, if it had been imparted ever so modestly and with ever so much tact. As to the little book to which the man on the floor had referred, we acquired a knowledge of it afterwards, and Mr. Jarndyce said he doubted if Robinson Crusoe could have read it, though he had had no other on his desolate island.

We were much relieved, under these circumstances, when Mrs. Pardiggle left off.

The man on the floor, then turning his head round again, said morosely, "Well! You've done, have you?"

"For to-day, I have, my friend. But I am never fatigued. I shall come to you again in your regular order," returned Mrs. Pardiggle with demonstrative cheerfulness.

"So long as you goes now," said he, folding his arms and shutting his eyes with an oath, "you may do wot you like!"

Mrs. Pardiggle accordingly rose and made a little vortex in the confined

room from which the pipe itself very narrowly escaped. Taking one of her young family in each hand, and telling the others to follow closely, and expressing her hope that the brickmaker and all his house would be improved when she saw them next, she then proceeded to another cottage. I hope it is not unkind in me to say that she certainly did make, in this as in everything else, a show that was not conciliatory of doing charity by wholesale and of dealing in it to a large extent.

She supposed that we were following her, but as soon as the space was left clear, we approached the woman sitting by the fire to ask if the baby were ill.

She only looked at it as it lay on her lap. We had observed before that when she looked at it she covered her discoloured eye with her hand, as though she wished to separate any association with noise and violence and ill treatment from the poor little child.

Ada, whose gentle heart was moved by its appearance, bent down to touch its little face. As she did so, I saw what happened and drew her back. The child died.

“Oh, Esther!” cried Ada, sinking on her knees beside it. “Look here! Oh, Esther, my love, the little thing! The suffering, quiet, pretty little thing! I am so sorry for it. I am so sorry for the mother. I never saw a sight so pitiful as this before! Oh, baby, baby!”

Such compassion, such gentleness, as that with which she bent down weeping and put her hand upon the mother’s might have softened any mother’s heart that ever beat. The woman at first gazed at her in astonishment and then burst into tears.

Presently I took the light burden from her lap, did what I could to make the baby’s rest the prettier and gentler, laid it on a shelf, and covered it with my own handkerchief. We tried to comfort the mother, and we whispered to her what Our Saviour said of children. She answered nothing, but sat weeping—weeping very much.

When I turned, I found that the young man had taken out the dog and was standing at the door looking in upon us with dry eyes, but quiet. The girl was quiet too and sat in a corner looking on the ground. The man had risen. He still smoked his pipe with an air of defiance, but he was silent.

An ugly woman, very poorly clothed, hurried in while I was glancing at them, and coming straight up to the mother, said, “Jenny! Jenny!” The

mother rose on being so addressed and fell upon the woman's neck.

She also had upon her face and arms the marks of ill usage. She had no kind of grace about her, but the grace of sympathy; but when she condoled with the woman, and her own tears fell, she wanted no beauty. I say condoled, but her only words were "Jenny! Jenny!" All the rest was in the tone in which she said them.

I thought it very touching to see these two women, coarse and shabby and beaten, so united; to see what they could be to one another; to see how they felt for one another, how the heart of each to each was softened by the hard trials of their lives. I think the best side of such people is almost hidden from us. What the poor are to the poor is little known, excepting to themselves and God.

We felt it better to withdraw and leave them uninterrupted. We stole out quietly and without notice from any one except the man. He was leaning against the wall near the door, and finding that there was scarcely room for us to pass, went out before us. He seemed to want to hide that he did this on our account, but we perceived that he did, and thanked him. He made no answer.

Ada was so full of grief all the way home, and Richard, whom we found at home, was so distressed to see her in tears (though he said to me, when she was not present, how beautiful it was too!), that we arranged to return at night with some little comforts and repeat our visit at the brick-maker's house. We said as little as we could to Mr. Jarndyce, but the wind changed directly.

Richard accompanied us at night to the scene of our morning expedition. On our way there, we had to pass a noisy drinking-house, where a number of men were flocking about the door. Among them, and prominent in some dispute, was the father of the little child. At a short distance, we passed the young man and the dog, in congenial company. The sister was standing laughing and talking with some other young women at the corner of the row of cottages, but she seemed ashamed and turned away as we went by.

We left our escort within sight of the brickmaker's dwelling and proceeded by ourselves. When we came to the door, we found the woman who had brought such consolation with her standing there looking anxiously out.

"It's you, young ladies, is it?" she said in a whisper. "I'm a-watching for

my master. My heart's in my mouth. If he was to catch me away from home, he'd pretty near murder me."

"Do you mean your husband?" said I.

"Yes, miss, my master. Jenny's asleep, quite worn out. She's scarcely had the child off her lap, poor thing, these seven days and nights, except when I've been able to take it for a minute or two."

As she gave way for us, she went softly in and put what we had brought near the miserable bed on which the mother slept. No effort had been made to clean the room—it seemed in its nature almost hopeless of being clean; but the small waxen form from which so much solemnity diffused itself had been composed afresh, and washed, and neatly dressed in some fragments of white linen; and on my handkerchief, which still covered the poor baby, a little bunch of sweet herbs had been laid by the same rough, scarred hands, so lightly, so tenderly!

"May heaven reward you!" we said to her. "You are a good woman."

"Me, young ladies?" she returned with surprise. "Hush! Jenny, Jenny!"

The mother had moaned in her sleep and moved. The sound of the familiar voice seemed to calm her again. She was quiet once more.

How little I thought, when I raised my handkerchief to look upon the tiny sleeper underneath and seemed to see a halo shine around the child through Ada's drooping hair as her pity bent her head—how little I thought in whose unquiet bosom that handkerchief would come to lie after covering the motionless and peaceful breast! I only thought that perhaps the Angel of the child might not be all unconscious of the woman who replaced it with so compassionate a hand; not all unconscious of her presently, when we had taken leave, and left her at the door, by turns looking, and listening in terror for herself, and saying in her old soothing manner, "Jenny, Jenny!"

CHAPTER IX

Signs and Tokens

I DON'T KNOW HOW it is I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think about myself as little as possible, and I am sure, when I find myself coming into the story again, I am really vexed and say, "Dear, dear, you tiresome little creature, I wish you wouldn't!" but it is all of no use. I hope any one who may read what I write will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them and can't be kept out.

My darling and I read together, and worked, and practised, and found so much employment for our time that the winter days flew by us like bright-winged birds. Generally in the afternoons, and always in the evenings, Richard gave us his company. Although he was one of the most restless creatures in the world, he certainly was very fond of our society.

He was very, very, very fond of Ada. I mean it, and I had better say it at once. I had never seen any young people falling in love before, but I found them out quite soon. I could not say so, of course, or show that I knew anything about it. On the contrary, I was so demure and used to seem so unconscious that sometimes I considered within myself while I was sitting at work whether I was not growing quite deceitful.

But there was no help for it. All I had to do was to be quiet, and I was as quiet as a mouse. They were as quiet as mice too, so far as any words were concerned, but the innocent manner in which they relied more and more upon me as they took more and more to one another was so charming that I had great difficulty in not showing how it interested me.

"Our dear little old woman is such a capital old woman," Richard would say, coming up to meet me in the garden early, with his pleasant laugh and perhaps the least tinge of a blush, "that I can't get on without her. Before I begin my harum-scarum day—grinding away at those books and instruments and then galloping up hill and down dale, all the country round,

like a highwayman—it does me so much good to come and have a steady walk with our comfortable friend, that here I am again!”

“You know, Dame Durden, dear,” Ada would say at night, with her head upon my shoulder and the firelight shining in her thoughtful eyes, “I don’t want to talk when we come upstairs here. Only to sit a little while thinking, with your dear face for company, and to hear the wind and remember the poor sailors at sea—”

Ah! Perhaps Richard was going to be a sailor. We had talked it over very often now, and there was some talk of gratifying the inclination of his childhood for the sea. Mr. Jarndyce had written to a relation of the family, a great Sir Leicester Dedlock, for his interest in Richard’s favour, generally; and Sir Leicester had replied in a gracious manner that he would be happy to advance the prospects of the young gentleman if it should ever prove to be within his power, which was not at all probable, and that my Lady sent her compliments to the young gentleman (to whom she perfectly remembered that she was allied by remote consanguinity) and trusted that he would ever do his duty in any honourable profession to which he might devote himself.

“So I apprehend it’s pretty clear,” said Richard to me, “that I shall have to work my own way. Never mind! Plenty of people have had to do that before now, and have done it. I only wish I had the command of a clipping privateer to begin with and could carry off the Chancellor and keep him on short allowance until he gave judgment in our cause. He’d find himself growing thin, if he didn’t look sharp!”

With a buoyancy and hopefulness and a gaiety that hardly ever flagged, Richard had a carelessness in his character that quite perplexed me, principally because he mistook it, in such a very odd way, for prudence. It entered into all his calculations about money in a singular manner which I don’t think I can better explain than by reverting for a moment to our loan to Mr. Skimpole.

Mr. Jarndyce had ascertained the amount, either from Mr. Skimpole himself or from Coavinses, and had placed the money in my hands with instructions to me to retain my own part of it and hand the rest to Richard. The number of little acts of thoughtless expenditure which Richard justified by the recovery of his ten pounds, and the number of times he talked to me as if he had saved or realized that amount, would form a sum in simple

addition.

“My prudent Mother Hubbard, why not?” he said to me when he wanted, without the least consideration, to bestow five pounds on the brickmaker. “I made ten pounds, clear, out of Coavinses’ business.”

“How was that?” said I.

“Why, I got rid of ten pounds which I was quite content to get rid of and never expected to see any more. You don’t deny that?”

“No,” said I.

“Very well! Then I came into possession of ten pounds—”

“The same ten pounds,” I hinted.

“That has nothing to do with it!” returned Richard. “I have got ten pounds more than I expected to have, and consequently I can afford to spend it without being particular.”

In exactly the same way, when he was persuaded out of the sacrifice of these five pounds by being convinced that it would do no good, he carried that sum to his credit and drew upon it.

“Let me see!” he would say. “I saved five pounds out of the brickmaker’s affair, so if I have a good rattle to London and back in a post-chaise and put that down at four pounds, I shall have saved one. And it’s a very good thing to save one, let me tell you: a penny saved is a penny got!”

I believe Richard’s was as frank and generous a nature as there possibly can be. He was ardent and brave, and in the midst of all his wild restlessness, was so gentle that I knew him like a brother in a few weeks. His gentleness was natural to him and would have shown itself abundantly even without Ada’s influence; but with it, he became one of the most winning of companions, always so ready to be interested and always so happy, sanguine, and light-hearted. I am sure that I, sitting with them, and walking with them, and talking with them, and noticing from day to day how they went on, falling deeper and deeper in love, and saying nothing about it, and each shyly thinking that this love was the greatest of secrets, perhaps not yet suspected even by the other—I am sure that I was scarcely less enchanted than they were and scarcely less pleased with the pretty dream.

We were going on in this way, when one morning at breakfast Mr. Jarndyce received a letter, and looking at the superscription, said, “From Boythorn? Aye, aye!” and opened and read it with evident pleasure,

announcing to us in a parenthesis when he was about half-way through, that Boythorn was “coming down” on a visit. Now who was Boythorn, we all thought. And I dare say we all thought too—I am sure I did, for one—would Boythorn at all interfere with what was going forward?

“I went to school with this fellow, Lawrence Boythorn,” said Mr. Jarndyce, tapping the letter as he laid it on the table, “more than five and forty years ago. He was then the most impetuous boy in the world, and he is now the most impetuous man. He was then the loudest boy in the world, and he is now the loudest man. He was then the heartiest and sturdiest boy in the world, and he is now the heartiest and sturdiest man. He is a tremendous fellow.”

“In stature, sir?” asked Richard.

“Pretty well, Rick, in that respect,” said Mr. Jarndyce; “being some ten years older than I and a couple of inches taller, with his head thrown back like an old soldier, his stalwart chest squared, his hands like a clean blacksmith’s, and his lungs! There’s no simile for his lungs. Talking, laughing, or snoring, they make the beams of the house shake.”

As Mr. Jarndyce sat enjoying the image of his friend Boythorn, we observed the favourable omen that there was not the least indication of any change in the wind.

“But it’s the inside of the man, the warm heart of the man, the passion of the man, the fresh blood of the man, Rick—and Ada, and little Cobweb too, for you are all interested in a visitor—that I speak of,” he pursued. “His language is as sounding as his voice. He is always in extremes, perpetually in the superlative degree. In his condemnation he is all ferocity. You might suppose him to be an ogre from what he says, and I believe he has the reputation of one with some people. There! I tell you no more of him beforehand. You must not be surprised to see him take me under his protection, for he has never forgotten that I was a low boy at school and that our friendship began in his knocking two of my head tyrant’s teeth out (he says six) before breakfast. Boythorn and his man,” to me, “will be here this afternoon, my dear.”

I took care that the necessary preparations were made for Mr. Boythorn’s reception, and we looked forward to his arrival with some curiosity. The afternoon wore away, however, and he did not appear. The dinner-hour arrived, and still he did not appear. The dinner was put back an hour, and

we were sitting round the fire with no light but the blaze when the hall-door suddenly burst open and the hall resounded with these words, uttered with the greatest vehemence and in a stentorian tone: “We have been misdirected, Jarndyce, by a most abandoned ruffian, who told us to take the turning to the right instead of to the left. He is the most intolerable scoundrel on the face of the earth. His father must have been a most consummate villain, ever to have such a son. I would have had that fellow shot without the least remorse!”

“Did he do it on purpose?” Mr. Jarndyce inquired.

“I have not the slightest doubt that the scoundrel has passed his whole existence in misdirecting travellers!” returned the other. “By my soul, I thought him the worst-looking dog I had ever beheld when he was telling me to take the turning to the right. And yet I stood before that fellow face to face and didn’t knock his brains out!”

“Teeth, you mean?” said Mr. Jarndyce.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Mr. Lawrence Boythorn, really making the whole house vibrate. “What, you have not forgotten it yet! Ha, ha, ha! And that was another most consummate vagabond! By my soul, the countenance of that fellow when he was a boy was the blackest image of perfidy, cowardice, and cruelty ever set up as a scarecrow in a field of scoundrels. If I were to meet that most unparalleled despot in the streets to-morrow, I would fell him like a rotten tree!”

“I have no doubt of it,” said Mr. Jarndyce. “Now, will you come upstairs?”

“By my soul, Jarndyce,” returned his guest, who seemed to refer to his watch, “if you had been married, I would have turned back at the garden-gate and gone away to the remotest summits of the Himalaya Mountains sooner than I would have presented myself at this unseasonable hour.”

“Not quite so far, I hope?” said Mr. Jarndyce.

“By my life and honour, yes!” cried the visitor. “I wouldn’t be guilty of the audacious insolence of keeping a lady of the house waiting all this time for any earthly consideration. I would infinitely rather destroy myself—infinitely rather!”

Talking thus, they went upstairs, and presently we heard him in his bedroom thundering “Ha, ha, ha!” and again “Ha, ha, ha!” until the flattest echo in the neighbourhood seemed to catch the contagion and to laugh as

enjoyingly as he did or as we did when we heard him laugh.

We all conceived a prepossession in his favour, for there was a sterling quality in this laugh, and in his vigorous, healthy voice, and in the roundness and fullness with which he uttered every word he spoke, and in the very fury of his superlatives, which seemed to go off like blank cannons and hurt nothing. But we were hardly prepared to have it so confirmed by his appearance when Mr. Jarndyce presented him. He was not only a very handsome old gentleman—upright and stalwart as he had been described to us—with a massive grey head, a fine composure of face when silent, a figure that might have become corpulent but for his being so continually in earnest that he gave it no rest, and a chin that might have subsided into a double chin but for the vehement emphasis in which it was constantly required to assist; but he was such a true gentleman in his manner, so chivalrously polite, his face was lighted by a smile of so much sweetness and tenderness, and it seemed so plain that he had nothing to hide, but showed himself exactly as he was—incapable, as Richard said, of anything on a limited scale, and firing away with those blank great guns because he carried no small arms whatever—that really I could not help looking at him with equal pleasure as he sat at dinner, whether he smilingly conversed with Ada and me, or was led by Mr. Jarndyce into some great volley of superlatives, or threw up his head like a bloodhound and gave out that tremendous "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You have brought your bird with you, I suppose?" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"By heaven, he is the most astonishing bird in Europe!" replied the other. "He IS the most wonderful creature! I wouldn't take ten thousand guineas for that bird. I have left an annuity for his sole support in case he should outlive me. He is, in sense and attachment, a phenomenon. And his father before him was one of the most astonishing birds that ever lived!"

The subject of this laudation was a very little canary, who was so tame that he was brought down by Mr. Boythorn's man, on his forefinger, and after taking a gentle flight round the room, alighted on his master's head. To hear Mr. Boythorn presently expressing the most implacable and passionate sentiments, with this fragile mite of a creature quietly perched on his forehead, was to have a good illustration of his character, I thought.

"By my soul, Jarndyce," he said, very gently holding up a bit of bread to the canary to peck at, "if I were in your place I would seize every master in

Chancery by the throat to-morrow morning and shake him until his money rolled out of his pockets and his bones rattled in his skin. I would have a settlement out of somebody, by fair means or by foul. If you would empower me to do it, I would do it for you with the greatest satisfaction!" (All this time the very small canary was eating out of his hand.)

"I thank you, Lawrence, but the suit is hardly at such a point at present," returned Mr. Jarndyce, laughing, "that it would be greatly advanced even by the legal process of shaking the bench and the whole bar."

"There never was such an infernal cauldron as that Chancery on the face of the earth!" said Mr. Boythorn. "Nothing but a mine below it on a busy day in term time, with all its records, rules, and precedents collected in it and every functionary belonging to it also, high and low, upward and downward, from its son the Accountant-General to its father the Devil, and the whole blown to atoms with ten thousand hundredweight of gunpowder, would reform it in the least!"

It was impossible not to laugh at the energetic gravity with which he recommended this strong measure of reform. When we laughed, he threw up his head and shook his broad chest, and again the whole country seemed to echo to his "Ha, ha, ha!" It had not the least effect in disturbing the bird, whose sense of security was complete and who hopped about the table with its quick head now on this side and now on that, turning its bright sudden eye on its master as if he were no more than another bird.

"But how do you and your neighbour get on about the disputed right of way?" said Mr. Jarndyce. "You are not free from the toils of the law yourself!"

"The fellow has brought actions against ME for trespass, and I have brought actions against HIM for trespass," returned Mr. Boythorn. "By heaven, he is the proudest fellow breathing. It is morally impossible that his name can be Sir Leicester. It must be Sir Lucifer."

"Complimentary to our distant relation!" said my guardian laughingly to Ada and Richard.

"I would beg Miss Clare's pardon and Mr. Carstone's pardon," resumed our visitor, "if I were not reassured by seeing in the fair face of the lady and the smile of the gentleman that it is quite unnecessary and that they keep their distant relation at a comfortable distance."

"Or he keeps us," suggested Richard.

“By my soul,” exclaimed Mr. Boythorn, suddenly firing another volley, “that fellow is, and his father was, and his grandfather was, the most stiff-necked, arrogant imbecile, pig-headed numskull, ever, by some inexplicable mistake of Nature, born in any station of life but a walking-stick’s! The whole of that family are the most solemnly conceited and consummate blockheads! But it’s no matter; he should not shut up my path if he were fifty baronets melted into one and living in a hundred Chesney Wolds, one within another, like the ivory balls in a Chinese carving. The fellow, by his agent, or secretary, or somebody, writes to me ‘Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, presents his compliments to Mr. Lawrence Boythorn, and has to call his attention to the fact that the green pathway by the old parsonage-house, now the property of Mr. Lawrence Boythorn, is Sir Leicester’s right of way, being in fact a portion of the park of Chesney Wold, and that Sir Leicester finds it convenient to close up the same.’ I write to the fellow, ‘Mr. Lawrence Boythorn presents his compliments to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and has to call HIS attention to the fact that he totally denies the whole of Sir Leicester Dedlock’s positions on every possible subject and has to add, in reference to closing up the pathway, that he will be glad to see the man who may undertake to do it.’ The fellow sends a most abandoned villain with one eye to construct a gateway. I play upon that execrable scoundrel with a fire-engine until the breath is nearly driven out of his body. The fellow erects a gate in the night. I chop it down and burn it in the morning. He sends his myrmidons to come over the fence and pass and repass. I catch them in humane man traps, fire split peas at their legs, play upon them with the engine—resolve to free mankind from the insupportable burden of the existence of those lurking ruffians. He brings actions for trespass; I bring actions for trespass. He brings actions for assault and battery; I defend them and continue to assault and batter. Ha, ha, ha!”

To hear him say all this with unimaginable energy, one might have thought him the angriest of mankind. To see him at the very same time, looking at the bird now perched upon his thumb and softly smoothing its feathers with his forefinger, one might have thought him the gentlest. To hear him laugh and see the broad good nature of his face then, one might have supposed that he had not a care in the world, or a dispute, or a dislike, but that his whole existence was a summer joke.

“No, no,” he said, “no closing up of my paths by any Dedlock! Though I willingly confess,” here he softened in a moment, “that Lady Dedlock is the most accomplished lady in the world, to whom I would do any homage that a plain gentleman, and no baronet with a head seven hundred years thick, may. A man who joined his regiment at twenty and within a week challenged the most imperious and presumptuous coxcomb of a commanding officer that ever drew the breath of life through a tight waist—and got broke for it—is not the man to be walked over by all the Sir Lucifers, dead or alive, locked or unlocked. Ha, ha, ha!”

“Nor the man to allow his junior to be walked over either?” said my guardian.

“Most assuredly not!” said Mr. Boythorn, clapping him on the shoulder with an air of protection that had something serious in it, though he laughed. “He will stand by the low boy, always. Jarndyce, you may rely upon him! But speaking of this trespass—with apologies to Miss Clare and Miss Summerson for the length at which I have pursued so dry a subject—is there nothing for me from your men Kenge and Carboy?”

“I think not, Esther?” said Mr. Jarndyce.

“Nothing, guardian.”

“Much obliged!” said Mr. Boythorn. “Had no need to ask, after even my slight experience of Miss Summerson’s forethought for every one about her.” (They all encouraged me; they were determined to do it.) “I inquired because, coming from Lincolnshire, I of course have not yet been in town, and I thought some letters might have been sent down here. I dare say they will report progress to-morrow morning.”

I saw him so often in the course of the evening, which passed very pleasantly, contemplate Richard and Ada with an interest and a satisfaction that made his fine face remarkably agreeable as he sat at a little distance from the piano listening to the music—and he had small occasion to tell us that he was passionately fond of music, for his face showed it—that I asked my guardian as we sat at the backgammon board whether Mr. Boythorn had ever been married.

“No,” said he. “No.”

“But he meant to be!” said I.

“How did you find out that?” he returned with a smile. “Why, guardian,” I explained, not without reddening a little at hazarding what was in my

thoughts, “there is something so tender in his manner, after all, and he is so very courtly and gentle to us, and—”

Mr. Jarndyce directed his eyes to where he was sitting as I have just described him.

I said no more.

“You are right, little woman,” he answered. “He was all but married once. Long ago. And once.”

“Did the lady die?”

“No—but she died to him. That time has had its influence on all his later life. Would you suppose him to have a head and a heart full of romance yet?”

“I think, guardian, I might have supposed so. But it is easy to say that when you have told me so.”

“He has never since been what he might have been,” said Mr. Jarndyce, “and now you see him in his age with no one near him but his servant and his little yellow friend. It’s your throw, my dear!”

I felt, from my guardian’s manner, that beyond this point I could not pursue the subject without changing the wind. I therefore forbore to ask any further questions. I was interested, but not curious. I thought a little while about this old love story in the night, when I was awakened by Mr. Boythorn’s lusty snoring; and I tried to do that very difficult thing, imagine old people young again and invested with the graces of youth. But I fell asleep before I had succeeded, and dreamed of the days when I lived in my godmother’s house. I am not sufficiently acquainted with such subjects to know whether it is at all remarkable that I almost always dreamed of that period of my life.

With the morning there came a letter from Messrs. Kenge and Carboy to Mr. Boythorn informing him that one of their clerks would wait upon him at noon. As it was the day of the week on which I paid the bills, and added up my books, and made all the household affairs as compact as possible, I remained at home while Mr. Jarndyce, Ada, and Richard took advantage of a very fine day to make a little excursion, Mr. Boythorn was to wait for Kenge and Carboy’s clerk and then was to go on foot to meet them on their return.

Well! I was full of business, examining tradesmen’s books, adding up columns, paying money, filing receipts, and I dare say making a great bustle

about it when Mr. Guppy was announced and shown in. I had had some idea that the clerk who was to be sent down might be the young gentleman who had met me at the coach-office, and I was glad to see him, because he was associated with my present happiness.

I scarcely knew him again, he was so uncommonly smart. He had an entirely new suit of glossy clothes on, a shining hat, lilac-kid gloves, a neckerchief of a variety of colours, a large hot-house flower in his button-hole, and a thick gold ring on his little finger. Besides which, he quite scented the dining-room with bear's-grease and other perfumery. He looked at me with an attention that quite confused me when I begged him to take a seat until the servant should return; and as he sat there crossing and uncrossing his legs in a corner, and I asked him if he had had a pleasant ride, and hoped that Mr. Kenge was well, I never looked at him, but I found him looking at me in the same scrutinizing and curious way.

When the request was brought to him that he would go upstairs to Mr. Boythorn's room, I mentioned that he would find lunch prepared for him when he came down, of which Mr. Jarndyce hoped he would partake. He said with some embarrassment, holding the handle of the door, "Shall I have the honour of finding you here, miss?" I replied yes, I should be there; and he went out with a bow and another look.

I thought him only awkward and shy, for he was evidently much embarrassed; and I fancied that the best thing I could do would be to wait until I saw that he had everything he wanted and then to leave him to himself. The lunch was soon brought, but it remained for some time on the table. The interview with Mr. Boythorn was a long one, and a stormy one too, I should think, for although his room was at some distance I heard his loud voice rising every now and then like a high wind, and evidently blowing perfect broadsides of denunciation.

At last Mr. Guppy came back, looking something the worse for the conference. "My eye, miss," he said in a low voice, "he's a Tartar!"

"Pray take some refreshment, sir," said I.

Mr. Guppy sat down at the table and began nervously sharpening the carving-knife on the carving-fork, still looking at me (as I felt quite sure without looking at him) in the same unusual manner. The sharpening lasted so long that at last I felt a kind of obligation on me to raise my eyes in order that I might break the spell under which he seemed to labour, of not being

able to leave off.

He immediately looked at the dish and began to carve.

“What will you take yourself, miss? You’ll take a morsel of something?”

“No, thank you,” said I.

“Shan’t I give you a piece of anything at all, miss?” said Mr. Guppy, hurriedly drinking off a glass of wine.

“Nothing, thank you,” said I. “I have only waited to see that you have everything you want. Is there anything I can order for you?”

“No, I am much obliged to you, miss, I’m sure. I’ve everything that I can require to make me comfortable—at least I—not comfortable—I’m never that.” He drank off two more glasses of wine, one after another.

I thought I had better go.

“I beg your pardon, miss!” said Mr. Guppy, rising when he saw me rise. “But would you allow me the favour of a minute’s private conversation?”

Not knowing what to say, I sat down again.

“What follows is without prejudice, miss?” said Mr. Guppy, anxiously bringing a chair towards my table.

“I don’t understand what you mean,” said I, wondering.

“It’s one of our law terms, miss. You won’t make any use of it to my detriment at Kenge and Carboy’s or elsewhere. If our conversation shouldn’t lead to anything, I am to be as I was and am not to be prejudiced in my situation or worldly prospects. In short, it’s in total confidence.”

“I am at a loss, sir,” said I, “to imagine what you can have to communicate in total confidence to me, whom you have never seen but once; but I should be very sorry to do you any injury.”

“Thank you, miss. I’m sure of it—that’s quite sufficient.” All this time Mr. Guppy was either planing his forehead with his handkerchief or tightly rubbing the palm of his left hand with the palm of his right. “If you would excuse my taking another glass of wine, miss, I think it might assist me in getting on without a continual choke that cannot fail to be mutually unpleasant.”

He did so, and came back again. I took the opportunity of moving well behind my table.

“You wouldn’t allow me to offer you one, would you miss?” said Mr. Guppy, apparently refreshed.

“Not any,” said I.

“Not half a glass?” said Mr. Guppy. “Quarter? No! Then, to proceed. My present salary, Miss Summerson, at Kenge and Carboy’s, is two pound a week. When I first had the happiness of looking upon you, it was one fifteen, and had stood at that figure for a lengthened period. A rise of five has since taken place, and a further rise of five is guaranteed at the expiration of a term not exceeding twelve months from the present date. My mother has a little property, which takes the form of a small life annuity, upon which she lives in an independent though unassuming manner in the Old Street Road. She is eminently calculated for a mother-in-law. She never interferes, is all for peace, and her disposition easy. She has her failings—as who has not?—but I never knew her do it when company was present, at which time you may freely trust her with wines, spirits, or malt liquors. My own abode is lodgings at Penton Place, Pentonville. It is lowly, but airy, open at the back, and considered one of the ’ealthiest outlets. Miss Summerson! In the mildest language, I adore you. Would you be so kind as to allow me (as I may say) to file a declaration—to make an offer!”

Mr. Guppy went down on his knees. I was well behind my table and not much frightened. I said, “Get up from that ridiculous position immediately, sir, or you will oblige me to break my implied promise and ring the bell!”

“Hear me out, miss!” said Mr. Guppy, folding his hands.

“I cannot consent to hear another word, sir,” I returned, “Unless you get up from the carpet directly and go and sit down at the table as you ought to do if you have any sense at all.”

He looked piteously, but slowly rose and did so.

“Yet what a mockery it is, miss,” he said with his hand upon his heart and shaking his head at me in a melancholy manner over the tray, “to be stationed behind food at such a moment. The soul recoils from food at such a moment, miss.”

“I beg you to conclude,” said I; “you have asked me to hear you out, and I beg you to conclude.”

“I will, miss,” said Mr. Guppy. “As I love and honour, so likewise I obey. Would that I could make thee the subject of that vow before the shrine!”

“That is quite impossible,” said I, “and entirely out of the question.”

“I am aware,” said Mr. Guppy, leaning forward over the tray and regarding me, as I again strangely felt, though my eyes were not directed to him, with his late intent look, “I am aware that in a worldly point of view,

according to all appearances, my offer is a poor one. But, Miss Summerson! Angel! No, don't ring—I have been brought up in a sharp school and am accustomed to a variety of general practice. Though a young man, I have ferreted out evidence, got up cases, and seen lots of life. Blest with your hand, what means might I not find of advancing your interests and pushing your fortunes! What might I not get to know, nearly concerning you? I know nothing now, certainly; but what MIGHT I not if I had your confidence, and you set me on?"

I told him that he addressed my interest or what he supposed to be my interest quite as unsuccessfully as he addressed my inclination, and he would now understand that I requested him, if he pleased, to go away immediately.

"Cruel miss," said Mr. Guppy, "hear but another word! I think you must have seen that I was struck with those charms on the day when I waited at the Whytorseller. I think you must have remarked that I could not forbear a tribute to those charms when I put up the steps of the 'ackney-coach. It was a feeble tribute to thee, but it was well meant. Thy image has ever since been fixed in my breast. I have walked up and down of an evening opposite Jellyby's house only to look upon the bricks that once contained thee. This out of to-day, quite an unnecessary out so far as the attendance, which was its pretended object, went, was planned by me alone for thee alone. If I speak of interest, it is only to recommend myself and my respectful wretchedness. Love was before it, and is before it."

"I should be pained, Mr. Guppy," said I, rising and putting my hand upon the bell-rope, "to do you or any one who was sincere the injustice of slighting any honest feeling, however disagreeably expressed. If you have really meant to give me a proof of your good opinion, though ill-timed and misplaced, I feel that I ought to thank you. I have very little reason to be proud, and I am not proud. I hope," I think I added, without very well knowing what I said, "that you will now go away as if you had never been so exceedingly foolish and attend to Messrs. Kenge and Carboy's business."

"Half a minute, miss!" cried Mr. Guppy, checking me as I was about to ring. "This has been without prejudice?"

"I will never mention it," said I, "unless you should give me future occasion to do so."

"A quarter of a minute, miss! In case you should think better at any time,

however distant—THAT'S no consequence, for my feelings can never alter—of anything I have said, particularly what might I not do, Mr. William Guppy, eighty-seven, Penton Place, or if removed, or dead (of blighted hopes or anything of that sort), care of Mrs. Guppy, three hundred and two, Old Street Road, will be sufficient."

I rang the bell, the servant came, and Mr. Guppy, laying his written card upon the table and making a dejected bow, departed. Raising my eyes as he went out, I once more saw him looking at me after he had passed the door.

I sat there for another hour or more, finishing my books and payments and getting through plenty of business. Then I arranged my desk, and put everything away, and was so composed and cheerful that I thought I had quite dismissed this unexpected incident. But, when I went upstairs to my own room, I surprised myself by beginning to laugh about it and then surprised myself still more by beginning to cry about it. In short, I was in a flutter for a little while and felt as if an old chord had been more coarsely touched than it ever had been since the days of the dear old doll, long buried in the garden.

CHAPTER X

The Law-Writer

ON THE EASTERN BORDERS of Chancery Lane, that is to say, more particularly in Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, Mr. Snagsby, law-stationer, pursues his lawful calling. In the shade of Cook's Court, at most times a shady place, Mr. Snagsby has dealt in all sorts of blank forms of legal process; in skins and rolls of parchment; in paper—foolscap, brief, draft, brown, white, whitey-brown, and blotting; in stamps; in office-quills, pens, ink, India-rubber, pounce, pins, pencils, sealing-wax, and wafers; in red tape and green ferret; in pocket-books, almanacs, diaries, and law lists; in string boxes, rulers, inkstands—glass and leaden—pen-knives, scissors, bodkins, and other small office-cutlery; in short, in articles too numerous to mention, ever since he was out of his time and went into partnership with Peffer. On that occasion, Cook's Court was in a manner revolutionized by the new inscription in fresh paint, PEFFER AND SNAGSBY, displacing the time-honoured and not easily to be deciphered legend PEFFER only. For smoke, which is the London ivy, had so wreathed itself round Peffer's name and clung to his dwelling-place that the affectionate parasite quite overpowered the parent tree.

Peffer is never seen in Cook's Court now. He is not expected there, for he has been recumbent this quarter of a century in the churchyard of St. Andrews, Holborn, with the waggons and hackney-coaches roaring past him all the day and half the night like one great dragon. If he ever steal forth when the dragon is at rest to air himself again in Cook's Court until admonished to return by the crowing of the sanguine cock in the cellar at the little dairy in Cursitor Street, whose ideas of daylight it would be curious to ascertain, since he knows from his personal observation next to nothing about it—if Peffer ever do revisit the pale glimpses of Cook's Court, which no law-stationer in the trade can positively deny, he comes invisibly, and no one is the worse or wiser.

In his lifetime, and likewise in the period of Snagsby's "time" of seven

long years, there dwelt with Peffer in the same law-stationering premises a niece—a short, shrewd niece, something too violently compressed about the waist, and with a sharp nose like a sharp autumn evening, inclining to be frosty towards the end. The Cook's Courtiers had a rumour flying among them that the mother of this niece did, in her daughter's childhood, moved by too jealous a solicitude that her figure should approach perfection, lace her up every morning with her maternal foot against the bed-post for a stronger hold and purchase; and further, that she exhibited internally pints of vinegar and lemon-juice, which acids, they held, had mounted to the nose and temper of the patient. With whichsoever of the many tongues of Rumour this frothy report originated, it either never reached or never influenced the ears of young Snagsby, who, having wooed and won its fair subject on his arrival at man's estate, entered into two partnerships at once. So now, in Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, Mr. Snagsby and the niece are one; and the niece still cherishes her figure, which, however tastes may differ, is unquestionably so far precious that there is mighty little of it.

Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby are not only one bone and one flesh, but, to the neighbours' thinking, one voice too. That voice, appearing to proceed from Mrs. Snagsby alone, is heard in Cook's Court very often. Mr. Snagsby, otherwise than as he finds expression through these dulcet tones, is rarely heard. He is a mild, bald, timid man with a shining head and a scrubby clump of black hair sticking out at the back. He tends to meekness and obesity. As he stands at his door in Cook's Court in his grey shop-coat and black calico sleeves, looking up at the clouds, or stands behind a desk in his dark shop with a heavy flat ruler, snipping and slicing at sheepskin in company with his two 'prentices, he is emphatically a retiring and unassuming man. From beneath his feet, at such times, as from a shrill ghost unquiet in its grave, there frequently arise complainings and lamentations in the voice already mentioned; and haply, on some occasions when these reach a sharper pitch than usual, Mr. Snagsby mentions to the 'prentices, "I think my little woman is a-giving it to Guster!"

This proper name, so used by Mr. Snagsby, has before now sharpened the wit of the Cook's Courtiers to remark that it ought to be the name of Mrs. Snagsby, seeing that she might with great force and expression be termed a Guster, in compliment to her stormy character. It is, however, the possession, and the only possession except fifty shillings per annum and a

very small box indifferently filled with clothing, of a lean young woman from a workhouse (by some supposed to have been christened Augusta) who, although she was farmed or contracted for during her growing time by an amiable benefactor of his species resident at Tooting, and cannot fail to have been developed under the most favourable circumstances, “has fits,” which the parish can’t account for.

Guster, really aged three or four and twenty, but looking a round ten years older, goes cheap with this unaccountable drawback of fits, and is so apprehensive of being returned on the hands of her patron saint that except when she is found with her head in the pail, or the sink, or the copper, or the dinner, or anything else that happens to be near her at the time of her seizure, she is always at work. She is a satisfaction to the parents and guardians of the ’prentices, who feel that there is little danger of her inspiring tender emotions in the breast of youth; she is a satisfaction to Mrs. Snagsby, who can always find fault with her; she is a satisfaction to Mr. Snagsby, who thinks it a charity to keep her. The law-stationer’s establishment is, in Guster’s eyes, a temple of plenty and splendour. She believes the little drawing-room upstairs, always kept, as one may say, with its hair in papers and its pinafore on, to be the most elegant apartment in Christendom. The view it commands of Cook’s Court at one end (not to mention a squint into Cursitor Street) and of Coavinses’ the sheriff’s officer’s backyard at the other she regards as a prospect of unequalled beauty. The portraits it displays in oil—and plenty of it too—of Mr. Snagsby looking at Mrs. Snagsby and of Mrs. Snagsby looking at Mr. Snagsby are in her eyes as achievements of Raphael or Titian. Guster has some recompenses for her many privations.

Mr. Snagsby refers everything not in the practical mysteries of the business to Mrs. Snagsby. She manages the money, reproaches the tax-gatherers, appoints the times and places of devotion on Sundays, licenses Mr. Snagsby’s entertainments, and acknowledges no responsibility as to what she thinks fit to provide for dinner, insomuch that she is the high standard of comparison among the neighbouring wives a long way down Chancery Lane on both sides, and even out in Holborn, who in any domestic passages of arms habitually call upon their husbands to look at the difference between their (the wives’) position and Mrs. Snagsby’s, and their (the husbands’) behaviour and Mr. Snagsby’s. Rumour, always flying bat-

like about Cook’s Court and skimming in and out at everybody’s windows, does say that Mrs. Snagsby is jealous and inquisitive and that Mr. Snagsby is sometimes worried out of house and home, and that if he had the spirit of a mouse he wouldn’t stand it. It is even observed that the wives who quote him to their self-willed husbands as a shining example in reality look down upon him and that nobody does so with greater superciliousness than one particular lady whose lord is more than suspected of laying his umbrella on her as an instrument of correction. But these vague whisperings may arise from Mr. Snagsby’s being in his way rather a meditative and poetical man, loving to walk in Staple Inn in the summer-time and to observe how countrified the sparrows and the leaves are, also to lounge about the Rolls Yard of a Sunday afternoon and to remark (if in good spirits) that there were old times once and that you’d find a stone coffin or two now under that chapel, he’ll be bound, if you was to dig for it. He solaces his imagination, too, by thinking of the many Chancellors and Vices, and Masters of the Rolls who are deceased; and he gets such a flavour of the country out of telling the two ’prentices how he HAS heard say that a brook “as clear as crystial” once ran right down the middle of Holborn, when Turnstile really was a turnstile, leading slap away into the meadows—gets such a flavour of the country out of this that he never wants to go there.

The day is closing in and the gas is lighted, but is not yet fully effective, for it is not quite dark. Mr. Snagsby standing at his shop-door looking up at the clouds sees a crow who is out late skim westward over the slice of sky belonging to Cook’s Court. The crow flies straight across Chancery Lane and Lincoln’s Inn Garden into Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

Here, in a large house, formerly a house of state, lives Mr. Tulkinghorn. It is let off in sets of chambers now, and in those shrunken fragments of its greatness, lawyers lie like maggots in nuts. But its roomy staircases, passages, and antechambers still remain; and even its painted ceilings, where Allegory, in Roman helmet and celestial linen, sprawls among balustrades and pillars, flowers, clouds, and big-legged boys, and makes the head ache—as would seem to be Allegory’s object always, more or less. Here, among his many boxes labelled with transcendent names, lives Mr. Tulkinghorn, when not speechlessly at home in country-houses where the great ones of the earth are bored to death. Here he is to-day, quiet at his table. An oyster of the old school whom nobody can open.

Like as he is to look at, so is his apartment in the dusk of the present afternoon. Rusty, out of date, withdrawing from attention, able to afford it. Heavy, broad-backed, old-fashioned, mahogany-and-horsehair chairs, not easily lifted; obsolete tables with spindle-legs and dusty baize covers; presentation prints of the holders of great titles in the last generation or the last but one, environ him. A thick and dingy Turkey-carpet muffles the floor where he sits, attended by two candles in old-fashioned silver candlesticks that give a very insufficient light to his large room. The titles on the backs of his books have retired into the binding; everything that can have a lock has got one; no key is visible. Very few loose papers are about. He has some manuscript near him, but is not referring to it. With the round top of an inkstand and two broken bits of sealing-wax he is silently and slowly working out whatever train of indecision is in his mind. Now the inkstand top is in the middle, now the red bit of sealing-wax, now the black bit. That's not it. Mr. Tulkinghorn must gather them all up and begin again.

Here, beneath the painted ceiling, with foreshortened Allegory staring down at his intrusion as if it meant to swoop upon him, and he cutting it dead, Mr. Tulkinghorn has at once his house and office. He keeps no staff, only one middle-aged man, usually a little out at elbows, who sits in a high pew in the hall and is rarely overburdened with business. Mr. Tulkinghorn is not in a common way. He wants no clerks. He is a great reservoir of confidences, not to be so tapped. His clients want HIM; he is all in all. Drafts that he requires to be drawn are drawn by special-pleaders in the temple on mysterious instructions; fair copies that he requires to be made are made at the stationers', expense being no consideration. The middle-aged man in the pew knows scarcely more of the affairs of the peerage than any crossing-sweeper in Holborn.

The red bit, the black bit, the inkstand top, the other inkstand top, the little sand-box. So! You to the middle, you to the right, you to the left. This train of indecision must surely be worked out now or never. Now! Mr. Tulkinghorn gets up, adjusts his spectacles, puts on his hat, puts the manuscript in his pocket, goes out, tells the middle-aged man out at elbows, "I shall be back presently." Very rarely tells him anything more explicit.

Mr. Tulkinghorn goes, as the crow came—not quite so straight, but nearly—to Cook's Court, Cursitor Street. To Snagsby's, Law-Stationer's, Deeds engrossed and copied, Law-Writing executed in all its branches, &c.,

&c., &c.

It is somewhere about five or six o’clock in the afternoon, and a balmy fragrance of warm tea hovers in Cook’s Court. It hovers about Snagsby’s door. The hours are early there: dinner at half-past one and supper at half-past nine. Mr. Snagsby was about to descend into the subterranean regions to take tea when he looked out of his door just now and saw the crow who was out late.

“Master at home?”

Guster is minding the shop, for the ’prentices take tea in the kitchen with Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby; consequently, the robe-maker’s two daughters, combing their curls at the two glasses in the two second-floor windows of the opposite house, are not driving the two ’prentices to distraction as they fondly suppose, but are merely awakening the unprofitable admiration of Guster, whose hair won’t grow, and never would, and it is confidently thought, never will.

“Master at home?” says Mr. Tulkinghorn.

Master is at home, and Guster will fetch him. Guster disappears, glad to get out of the shop, which she regards with mingled dread and veneration as a storehouse of awful implements of the great torture of the law—a place not to be entered after the gas is turned off.

Mr. Snagsby appears, greasy, warm, herbaceous, and chewing. Bolts a bit of bread and butter. Says, “Bless my soul, sir! Mr. Tulkinghorn!”

“I want half a word with you, Snagsby.”

“Certainly, sir! Dear me, sir, why didn’t you send your young man round for me? Pray walk into the back shop, sir.” Snagsby has brightened in a moment.

The confined room, strong of parchment-grease, is warehouse, counting-house, and copying-office. Mr. Tulkinghorn sits, facing round, on a stool at the desk.

“Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Snagsby.”

“Yes, sir.” Mr. Snagsby turns up the gas and coughs behind his hand, modestly anticipating profit. Mr. Snagsby, as a timid man, is accustomed to cough with a variety of expressions, and so to save words.

“You copied some affidavits in that cause for me lately.”

“Yes, sir, we did.”

“There was one of them,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn, carelessly feeling—

tight, unopenable oyster of the old school!—in the wrong coat-pocket, “the handwriting of which is peculiar, and I rather like. As I happened to be passing, and thought I had it about me, I looked in to ask you—but I haven’t got it. No matter, any other time will do. Ah! here it is! I looked in to ask you who copied this.”

“Who copied this, sir?” says Mr. Snagsby, taking it, laying it flat on the desk, and separating all the sheets at once with a twirl and a twist of the left hand peculiar to lawstationers. “We gave this out, sir. We were giving out rather a large quantity of work just at that time. I can tell you in a moment who copied it, sir, by referring to my book.”

Mr. Snagsby takes his book down from the safe, makes another bolt of the bit of bread and butter which seemed to have stopped short, eyes the affidavit aside, and brings his right forefinger travelling down a page of the book, “Jewby—Packer—Jarndyce.”

“Jarndyce! Here we are, sir,” says Mr. Snagsby. “To be sure! I might have remembered it. This was given out, sir, to a writer who lodges just over on the opposite side of the lane.”

Mr. Tulkinghorn has seen the entry, found it before the law-stationer, read it while the forefinger was coming down the hill.

“WHAT do you call him? Nemo?” says Mr. Tulkinghorn. “Nemo, sir. Here it is. Forty-two folio. Given out on the Wednesday night at eight o’clock, brought in on the Thursday morning at half after nine.”

“Nemo!” repeats Mr. Tulkinghorn. “Nemo is Latin for no one.”

“It must be English for some one, sir, I think,” Mr. Snagsby submits with his deferential cough. “It is a person’s name. Here it is, you see, sir! Forty-two folio. Given out Wednesday night, eight o’clock; brought in Thursday morning, half after nine.”

The tail of Mr. Snagsby’s eye becomes conscious of the head of Mrs. Snagsby looking in at the shop-door to know what he means by deserting his tea. Mr. Snagsby addresses an explanatory cough to Mrs. Snagsby, as who should say, “My dear, a customer!”

“Half after nine, sir,” repeats Mr. Snagsby. “Our law-writers, who live by job-work, are a queer lot; and this may not be his name, but it’s the name he goes by. I remember now, sir, that he gives it in a written advertisement he sticks up down at the Rule Office, and the King’s Bench Office, and the Judges’ Chambers, and so forth. You know the kind of document, sir—

wanting employ?”

Mr. Tulkinghorn glances through the little window at the back of Coavinses’, the sheriff’s officer’s, where lights shine in Coavinses’ windows. Coavinses’ coffee-room is at the back, and the shadows of several gentlemen under a cloud loom cloudily upon the blinds. Mr. Snagsby takes the opportunity of slightly turning his head to glance over his shoulder at his little woman and to make apologetic motions with his mouth to this effect: “Tul-king-horn—rich—in-flu-en-tial!”

“Have you given this man work before?” asks Mr. Tulkinghorn.

“Oh, dear, yes, sir! Work of yours.”

“Thinking of more important matters, I forget where you said he lived?”

“Across the lane, sir. In fact, he lodges at a—” Mr. Snagsby makes another bolt, as if the bit of bread and buffer were insurmountable “—at a rag and bottle shop.”

“Can you show me the place as I go back?”

“With the greatest pleasure, sir!”

Mr. Snagsby pulls off his sleeves and his grey coat, pulls on his black coat, takes his hat from its peg. “Oh! Here is my little woman!” he says aloud. “My dear, will you be so kind as to tell one of the lads to look after the shop while I step across the lane with Mr. Tulkinghorn? Mrs. Snagsby, sir—I shan’t be two minutes, my love!”

Mrs. Snagsby bends to the lawyer, retires behind the counter, peeps at them through the window-blind, goes softly into the back office, refers to the entries in the book still lying open. Is evidently curious.

“You will find that the place is rough, sir,” says Mr. Snagsby, walking deferentially in the road and leaving the narrow pavement to the lawyer; “and the party is very rough. But they’re a wild lot in general, sir. The advantage of this particular man is that he never wants sleep. He’ll go at it right on end if you want him to, as long as ever you like.”

It is quite dark now, and the gas-lamps have acquired their full effect. Jostling against clerks going to post the day’s letters, and against counsel and attorneys going home to dinner, and against plaintiffs and defendants and suitors of all sorts, and against the general crowd, in whose way the forensic wisdom of ages has interposed a million of obstacles to the transaction of the commonest business of life; diving through law and equity, and through that kindred mystery, the street mud, which is made of

nobody knows what and collects about us nobody knows whence or how—we only knowing in general that when there is too much of it we find it necessary to shovel it away—the lawyer and the law-stationer come to a rag and bottle shop and general emporium of much disregarded merchandise, lying and being in the shadow of the wall of Lincoln's Inn, and kept, as is announced in paint, to all whom it may concern, by one Krook.

"This is where he lives, sir," says the law-stationer.

"This is where he lives, is it?" says the lawyer unconcernedly. "Thank you."

"Are you not going in, sir?"

"No, thank you, no; I am going on to the Fields at present. Good evening. Thank you!" Mr. Snagsby lifts his hat and returns to his little woman and his tea.

But Mr. Tulkinghorn does not go on to the Fields at present. He goes a short way, turns back, comes again to the shop of Mr. Krook, and enters it straight. It is dim enough, with a blot-headed candle or so in the windows, and an old man and a cat sitting in the back part by a fire. The old man rises and comes forward, with another blot-headed candle in his hand.

"Pray is your lodger within?"

"Male or female, sir?" says Mr. Krook.

"Male. The person who does copying."

Mr. Krook has eyed his man narrowly. Knows him by sight. Has an indistinct impression of his aristocratic repute.

"Did you wish to see him, sir?"

"Yes."

"It's what I seldom do myself," says Mr. Krook with a grin. "Shall I call him down? But it's a weak chance if he'd come, sir!"

"I'll go up to him, then," says Mr. Tulkinghorn.

"Second floor, sir. Take the candle. Up there!" Mr. Krook, with his cat beside him, stands at the bottom of the staircase, looking after Mr. Tulkinghorn. "Hi-hi!" he says when Mr. Tulkinghorn has nearly disappeared. The lawyer looks down over the hand-rail. The cat expands her wicked mouth and snarls at him.

"Order, Lady Jane! Behave yourself to visitors, my lady! You know what they say of my lodger?" whispers Krook, going up a step or two.

"What do they say of him?"

“They say he has sold himself to the enemy, but you and I know better—he don’t buy. I’ll tell you what, though; my lodger is so black-humoured and gloomy that I believe he’d as soon make that bargain as any other. Don’t put him out, sir. That’s my advice!”

Mr. Tulkinghorn with a nod goes on his way. He comes to the dark door on the second floor. He knocks, receives no answer, opens it, and accidentally extinguishes his candle in doing so.

The air of the room is almost bad enough to have extinguished it if he had not. It is a small room, nearly black with soot, and grease, and dirt. In the rusty skeleton of a grate, pinched at the middle as if poverty had gripped it, a red coke fire burns low. In the corner by the chimney stand a deal table and a broken desk, a wilderness marked with a rain of ink. In another corner a ragged old portmanteau on one of the two chairs serves for cabinet or wardrobe; no larger one is needed, for it collapses like the cheeks of a starved man. The floor is bare, except that one old mat, trodden to shreds of rope-yarn, lies perishing upon the hearth. No curtain veils the darkness of the night, but the discoloured shutters are drawn together, and through the two gaunt holes pierced in them, famine might be staring in—the banshee of the man upon the bed.

For, on a low bed opposite the fire, a confusion of dirty patchwork, lean-ribbed ticking, and coarse sacking, the lawyer, hesitating just within the doorway, sees a man. He lies there, dressed in shirt and trousers, with bare feet. He has a yellow look in the spectral darkness of a candle that has guttered down until the whole length of its wick (still burning) has doubled over and left a tower of winding-sheet above it. His hair is ragged, mingling with his whiskers and his beard—the latter, ragged too, and grown, like the scum and mist around him, in neglect. Foul and filthy as the room is, foul and filthy as the air is, it is not easy to perceive what fumes those are which most oppress the senses in it; but through the general sickliness and faintness, and the odour of stale tobacco, there comes into the lawyer’s mouth the bitter, vapid taste of opium.

“Hallo, my friend!” he cries, and strikes his iron candlestick against the door.

He thinks he has awakened his friend. He lies a little turned away, but his eyes are surely open.

“Hallo, my friend!” he cries again. “Hallo! Hallo!”

As he rattles on the door, the candle which has drooped so long goes out and leaves him in the dark, with the gaunt eyes in the shutters staring down upon the bed.

CHAPTER XI

Our Dear Brother

A TOUCH ON THE lawyer's wrinkled hand as he stands in the dark room, irresolute, makes him start and say, "What's that?"

"It's me," returns the old man of the house, whose breath is in his ear. "Can't you wake him?"

"No."

"What have you done with your candle?"

"It's gone out. Here it is."

Krook takes it, goes to the fire, stoops over the red embers, and tries to get a light. The dying ashes have no light to spare, and his endeavours are vain. Muttering, after an ineffectual call to his lodger, that he will go downstairs and bring a lighted candle from the shop, the old man departs. Mr. Tulkinghorn, for some new reason that he has, does not await his return in the room, but on the stairs outside.

The welcome light soon shines upon the wall, as Krook comes slowly up with his green-eyed cat following at his heels. "Does the man generally sleep like this?" inquired the lawyer in a low voice. "Hi! I don't know," says Krook, shaking his head and lifting his eyebrows. "I know next to nothing of his habits except that he keeps himself very close."

Thus whispering, they both go in together. As the light goes in, the great eyes in the shutters, darkening, seem to close. Not so the eyes upon the bed.

"God save us!" exclaims Mr. Tulkinghorn. "He is dead!" Krook drops the heavy hand he has taken up so suddenly that the arm swings over the bedside.

They look at one another for a moment.

"Send for some doctor! Call for Miss Flite up the stairs, sir. Here's poison by the bed! Call out for Flite, will you?" says Krook, with his lean hands spread out above the body like a vampire's wings.

Mr. Tulkinghorn hurries to the landing and calls, "Miss Flite! Flite! Make haste, here, whoever you are! Flite!" Krook follows him with his

eyes, and while he is calling, finds opportunity to steal to the old portmanteau and steal back again.

“Run, Flite, run! The nearest doctor! Run!” So Mr. Krook addresses a crazy little woman who is his female lodger, who appears and vanishes in a breath, who soon returns accompanied by a testy medical man brought from his dinner, with a broad, snuffy upper lip and a broad Scotch tongue.

“Ey! Bless the hearts o’ ye,” says the medical man, looking up at them after a moment’s examination. “He’s just as dead as Phairy!”

Mr. Tulkinghorn (standing by the old portmanteau) inquires if he has been dead any time.

“Any time, sir?” says the medical gentleman. “It’s probable he wull have been dead aboot three hours.”

“About that time, I should say,” observes a dark young man on the other side of the bed.

“Air you in the maydickle prayfession yourself, sir?” inquires the first.

The dark young man says yes.

“Then I’ll just tak’ my depairture,” replies the other, “for I’m nae gude here!” With which remark he finishes his brief attendance and returns to finish his dinner.

The dark young surgeon passes the candle across and across the face and carefully examines the law-writer, who has established his pretensions to his name by becoming indeed No one.

“I knew this person by sight very well,” says he. “He has purchased opium of me for the last year and a half. Was anybody present related to him?” glancing round upon the three bystanders.

“I was his landlord,” grimly answers Krook, taking the candle from the surgeon’s outstretched hand. “He told me once I was the nearest relation he had.”

“He has died,” says the surgeon, “of an over-dose of opium, there is no doubt. The room is strongly flavoured with it. There is enough here now,” taking an old tea-pot from Mr. Krook, “to kill a dozen people.”

“Do you think he did it on purpose?” asks Krook.

“Took the over-dose?”

“Yes!” Krook almost smacks his lips with the unction of a horrible interest.

“I can’t say. I should think it unlikely, as he has been in the habit of

taking so much. But nobody can tell. He was very poor, I suppose?”

“I suppose he was. His room—don’t look rich,” says Krook, who might have changed eyes with his cat, as he casts his sharp glance around. “But I have never been in it since he had it, and he was too close to name his circumstances to me.”

“Did he owe you any rent?”

“Six weeks.”

“He will never pay it!” says the young man, resuming his examination. “It is beyond a doubt that he is indeed as dead as Pharaoh; and to judge from his appearance and condition, I should think it a happy release. Yet he must have been a good figure when a youth, and I dare say, good-looking.” He says this, not unfeelingly, while sitting on the bedstead’s edge with his face towards that other face and his hand upon the region of the heart. “I recollect once thinking there was something in his manner, uncouth as it was, that denoted a fall in life. Was that so?” he continues, looking round.

Krook replies, “You might as well ask me to describe the ladies whose heads of hair I have got in sacks downstairs. Than that he was my lodger for a year and a half and lived—or didn’t live—by law-writing, I know no more of him.”

During this dialogue Mr. Tulkinghorn has stood aloof by the old portmanteau, with his hands behind him, equally removed, to all appearance, from all three kinds of interest exhibited near the bed—from the young surgeon’s professional interest in death, noticeable as being quite apart from his remarks on the deceased as an individual; from the old man’s unction; and the little crazy woman’s awe. His imperturbable face has been as inexpressive as his rusty clothes. One could not even say he has been thinking all this while. He has shown neither patience nor impatience, nor attention nor abstraction. He has shown nothing but his shell. As easily might the tone of a delicate musical instrument be inferred from its case, as the tone of Mr. Tulkinghorn from his case.

He now interposes, addressing the young surgeon in his unmoved, professional way.

“I looked in here,” he observes, “just before you, with the intention of giving this deceased man, whom I never saw alive, some employment at his trade of copying. I had heard of him from my stationer—Snagsby of Cook’s Court. Since no one here knows anything about him, it might be as well to

send for Snagsby. Ah!" to the little crazy woman, who has often seen him in court, and whom he has often seen, and who proposes, in frightened dumb-show, to go for the law-stationer. "Suppose you do!"

While she is gone, the surgeon abandons his hopeless investigation and covers its subject with the patchwork counterpane. Mr. Krook and he interchange a word or two. Mr. Tulkinghorn says nothing, but stands, ever, near the old portmanteau.

Mr. Snagsby arrives hastily in his grey coat and his black sleeves. "Dear me, dear me," he says; "and it has come to this, has it! Bless my soul!"

"Can you give the person of the house any information about this unfortunate creature, Snagsby?" inquires Mr. Tulkinghorn. "He was in arrears with his rent, it seems. And he must be buried, you know."

"Well, sir," says Mr. Snagsby, coughing his apologetic cough behind his hand, "I really don't know what advice I could offer, except sending for the beadle."

"I don't speak of advice," returns Mr. Tulkinghorn. "I could advise—"

"No one better, sir, I am sure," says Mr. Snagsby, with his deferential cough.

"I speak of affording some clue to his connexions, or to where he came from, or to anything concerning him."

"I assure you, sir," says Mr. Snagsby after prefacing his reply with his cough of general propitiation, "that I no more know where he came from than I know—"

"Where he has gone to, perhaps," suggests the surgeon to help him out.

A pause. Mr. Tulkinghorn looking at the law-stationer. Mr. Krook, with his mouth open, looking for somebody to speak next.

"As to his connexions, sir," says Mr. Snagsby, "if a person was to say to me, 'Snagsby, here's twenty thousand pound down, ready for you in the Bank of England if you'll only name one of 'em,' I couldn't do it, sir! About a year and a half ago—to the best of my belief, at the time when he first came to lodge at the present rag and bottle shop—"

"That was the time!" says Krook with a nod.

"About a year and a half ago," says Mr. Snagsby, strengthened, "he came into our place one morning after breakfast, and finding my little woman (which I name Mrs. Snagsby when I use that appellation) in our shop, produced a specimen of his handwriting and gave her to understand that he

was in want of copying work to do and was, not to put too fine a point upon it," a favourite apology for plain speaking with Mr. Snagsby, which he always offers with a sort of argumentative frankness, "hard up! My little woman is not in general partial to strangers, particular—not to put too fine a point upon it—when they want anything. But she was rather took by something about this person, whether by his being unshaved, or by his hair being in want of attention, or by what other ladies' reasons, I leave you to judge; and she accepted of the specimen, and likewise of the address. My little woman hasn't a good ear for names," proceeds Mr. Snagsby after consulting his cough of consideration behind his hand, "and she considered Nemo equally the same as Nimrod. In consequence of which, she got into a habit of saying to me at meals, 'Mr. Snagsby, you haven't found Nimrod any work yet!' or 'Mr. Snagsby, why didn't you give that eight and thirty Chancery folio in Jarndyce to Nimrod?' or such like. And that is the way he gradually fell into job-work at our place; and that is the most I know of him except that he was a quick hand, and a hand not sparing of night-work, and that if you gave him out, say, five and forty folio on the Wednesday night, you would have it brought in on the Thursday morning. All of which —" Mr. Snagsby concludes by politely motioning with his hat towards the bed, as much as to add, "I have no doubt my honourable friend would confirm if he were in a condition to do it."

"Hadn't you better see," says Mr. Tulkinghorn to Krook, "whether he had any papers that may enlighten you? There will be an inquest, and you will be asked the question. You can read?"

"No, I can't," returns the old man with a sudden grin.

"Snagsby," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "look over the room for him. He will get into some trouble or difficulty otherwise. Being here, I'll wait if you make haste, and then I can testify on his behalf, if it should ever be necessary, that all was fair and right. If you will hold the candle for Mr. Snagsby, my friend, he'll soon see whether there is anything to help you."

"In the first place, here's an old portmanteau, sir," says Snagsby.

Ah, to be sure, so there is! Mr. Tulkinghorn does not appear to have seen it before, though he is standing so close to it, and though there is very little else, heaven knows.

The marine-store merchant holds the light, and the law-stationer conducts the search. The surgeon leans against the corner of the chimney-

piece; Miss Flite peeps and trembles just within the door. The apt old scholar of the old school, with his dull black breeches tied with ribbons at the knees, his large black waistcoat, his long-sleeved black coat, and his wisp of limp white neckerchief tied in the bow the peerage knows so well, stands in exactly the same place and attitude.

There are some worthless articles of clothing in the old portmanteau; there is a bundle of pawnbrokers' duplicates, those turnpike tickets on the road of poverty; there is a crumpled paper, smelling of opium, on which are scrawled rough memoranda—as, took, such a day, so many grains; took, such another day, so many more—begun some time ago, as if with the intention of being regularly continued, but soon left off. There are a few dirty scraps of newspapers, all referring to coroners' inquests; there is nothing else. They search the cupboard and the drawer of the ink-splashed table. There is not a morsel of an old letter or of any other writing in either. The young surgeon examines the dress on the law-writer. A knife and some odd halfpence are all he finds. Mr. Snagsby's suggestion is the practical suggestion after all, and the beadle must be called in.

So the little crazy lodger goes for the beadle, and the rest come out of the room. "Don't leave the cat there!" says the surgeon; "that won't do!" Mr. Krook therefore drives her out before him, and she goes furtively downstairs, winding her lithe tail and licking her lips.

"Good night!" says Mr. Tulkinghorn, and goes home to Allegory and meditation.

By this time the news has got into the court. Groups of its inhabitants assemble to discuss the thing, and the outposts of the army of observation (principally boys) are pushed forward to Mr. Krook's window, which they closely invest. A policeman has already walked up to the room, and walked down again to the door, where he stands like a tower, only condescending to see the boys at his base occasionally; but whenever he does see them, they quail and fall back. Mrs. Perkins, who has not been for some weeks on speaking terms with Mrs. Piper in consequence for an unpleasantness originating in young Perkins' having "fetched" young Piper "a crack," renews her friendly intercourse on this auspicious occasion. The potboy at the corner, who is a privileged amateur, as possessing official knowledge of life and having to deal with drunken men occasionally, exchanges confidential communications with the policeman and has the appearance of

an impregnable youth, unassailable by truncheons and unconfinable in station-houses. People talk across the court out of window, and bare-headed scouts come hurrying in from Chancery Lane to know what's the matter. The general feeling seems to be that it's a blessing Mr. Krook warn't made away with first, mingled with a little natural disappointment that he was not. In the midst of this sensation, the beadle arrives.

The beadle, though generally understood in the neighbourhood to be a ridiculous institution, is not without a certain popularity for the moment, if it were only as a man who is going to see the body. The policeman considers him an imbecile civilian, a remnant of the barbarous watchmen times, but gives him admission as something that must be borne with until government shall abolish him. The sensation is heightened as the tidings spread from mouth to mouth that the beadle is on the ground and has gone in.

By and by the beadle comes out, once more intensifying the sensation, which has rather languished in the interval. He is understood to be in want of witnesses for the inquest to-morrow who can tell the coroner and jury anything whatever respecting the deceased. Is immediately referred to innumerable people who can tell nothing whatever. Is made more imbecile by being constantly informed that Mrs. Green's son "was a law-writer his-self and knowed him better than anybody," which son of Mrs. Green's appears, on inquiry, to be at the present time aboard a vessel bound for China, three months out, but considered accessible by telegraph on application to the Lords of the Admiralty. Beadle goes into various shops and parlours, examining the inhabitants, always shutting the door first, and by exclusion, delay, and general idiotcy exasperating the public. Policeman seen to smile to potboy. Public loses interest and undergoes reaction. Taunts the beadle in shrill youthful voices with having boiled a boy, choruses fragments of a popular song to that effect and importing that the boy was made into soup for the workhouse. Policeman at last finds it necessary to support the law and seize a vocalist, who is released upon the flight of the rest on condition of his getting out of this then, come, and cutting it—a condition he immediately observes. So the sensation dies off for the time; and the unmoved policeman (to whom a little opium, more or less, is nothing), with his shining hat, stiff stock, inflexible great-coat, stout belt and bracelet, and all things fitting, pursues his lounging way with a heavy

tread, beating the palms of his white gloves one against the other and stopping now and then at a street-corner to look casually about for anything between a lost child and a murder.

Under cover of the night, the feeble-minded beadle comes flitting about Chancery Lane with his summonses, in which every juror's name is wrongly spelt, and nothing rightly spelt but the beadle's own name, which nobody can read or wants to know. The summonses served and his witnesses forewarned, the beadle goes to Mr. Krook's to keep a small appointment he has made with certain paupers, who, presently arriving, are conducted upstairs, where they leave the great eyes in the shutter something new to stare at, in that last shape which earthly lodgings take for No one—and for Every one.

And all that night the coffin stands ready by the old portmanteau; and the lonely figure on the bed, whose path in life has lain through five and forty years, lies there with no more track behind him that any one can trace than a deserted infant.

Next day the court is all alive—is like a fair, as Mrs. Perkins, more than reconciled to Mrs. Piper, says in amicable conversation with that excellent woman. The coroner is to sit in the first-floor room at the Sol's Arms, where the Harmonic Meetings take place twice a week and where the chair is filled by a gentleman of professional celebrity, faced by Little Swills, the comic vocalist, who hopes (according to the bill in the window) that his friends will rally round him and support first-rate talent. The Sol's Arms does a brisk stroke of business all the morning. Even children so require sustaining under the general excitement that a pieman who has established himself for the occasion at the corner of the court says his brandy-balls go off like smoke. What time the beadle, hovering between the door of Mr. Krook's establishment and the door of the Sol's Arms, shows the curiosity in his keeping to a few discreet spirits and accepts the compliment of a glass of ale or so in return.

At the appointed hour arrives the coroner, for whom the jurymen are waiting and who is received with a salute of skittles from the good dry skittle-ground attached to the Sol's Arms. The coroner frequents more public-houses than any man alive. The smell of sawdust, beer, tobacco-smoke, and spirits is inseparable in his vocation from death in its most awful shapes. He is conducted by the beadle and the landlord to the

Harmonic Meeting Room, where he puts his hat on the piano and takes a Windsor-chair at the head of a long table formed of several short tables put together and ornamented with glutinous rings in endless involutions, made by pots and glasses. As many of the jury as can crowd together at the table sit there. The rest get among the spittoons and pipes or lean against the piano. Over the coroner's head is a small iron garland, the pendant handle of a bell, which rather gives the majesty of the court the appearance of going to be hanged presently.

Call over and swear the jury! While the ceremony is in progress, sensation is created by the entrance of a chubby little man in a large shirt-collar, with a moist eye and an inflamed nose, who modestly takes a position near the door as one of the general public, but seems familiar with the room too. A whisper circulates that this is Little Swills. It is considered not unlikely that he will get up an imitation of the coroner and make it the principal feature of the Harmonic Meeting in the evening.

"Well, gentlemen—" the coroner begins.

"Silence there, will you!" says the beadle. Not to the coroner, though it might appear so.

"Well, gentlemen," resumes the coroner. "You are impanelled here to inquire into the death of a certain man. Evidence will be given before you as to the circumstances attending that death, and you will give your verdict according to the—skittles; they must be stopped, you know, beadle!—evidence, and not according to anything else. The first thing to be done is to view the body."

"Make way there!" cries the beadle.

So they go out in a loose procession, something after the manner of a straggling funeral, and make their inspection in Mr. Krook's back second floor, from which a few of the jurymen retire pale and precipitately. The beadle is very careful that two gentlemen not very neat about the cuffs and buttons (for whose accommodation he has provided a special little table near the coroner in the Harmonic Meeting Room) should see all that is to be seen. For they are the public chroniclers of such inquiries by the line; and he is not superior to the universal human infirmity, but hopes to read in print what "Mooney, the active and intelligent beadle of the district," said and did and even aspires to see the name of Mooney as familiarly and patronizingly mentioned as the name of the hangman is, according to the

latest examples.

Little Swills is waiting for the coroner and jury on their return. Mr. Tulkinghorn, also. Mr. Tulkinghorn is received with distinction and seated near the coroner between that high judicial officer, a bagatelle-board, and the coal-box. The inquiry proceeds. The jury learn how the subject of their inquiry died, and learn no more about him. “A very eminent solicitor is in attendance, gentlemen,” says the coroner, “who, I am informed, was accidentally present when discovery of the death was made, but he could only repeat the evidence you have already heard from the surgeon, the landlord, the lodger, and the law-stationer, and it is not necessary to trouble him. Is anybody in attendance who knows anything more?”

Mrs. Piper pushed forward by Mrs. Perkins. Mrs. Piper sworn.

Anastasia Piper, gentlemen. Married woman. Now, Mrs. Piper, what have you got to say about this?

Why, Mrs. Piper has a good deal to say, chiefly in parentheses and without punctuation, but not much to tell. Mrs. Piper lives in the court (which her husband is a cabinet-maker), and it has long been well beknown among the neighbours (counting from the day next but one before the half-baptizing of Alexander James Piper aged eighteen months and four days old on accounts of not being expected to live such was the sufferings gentlemen of that child in his gums) as the plaintive—so Mrs. Piper insists on calling the deceased—was reported to have sold himself. Thinks it was the plaintive’s air in which that report originatinin. See the plaintive often and considered as his air was feariocious and not to be allowed to go about some children being timid (and if doubted hoping Mrs. Perkins may be brought forard for she is here and will do credit to her husband and herself and family). Has seen the plaintive wexed and worrited by the children (for children they will ever be and you cannot expect them specially if of playful dispositions to be Methoozellers which you was not yourself). On accounts of this and his dark looks has often dreamed as she see him take a pick-axe from his pocket and split Johnny’s head (which the child knows not fear and has repeatually called after him close at his eels). Never however see the plaintive take a pick-axe or any other wepping far from it. Has seen him hurry away when run and called after as if not partial to children and never see him speak to neither child nor grown person at any time (excepting the boy that sweeps the crossing down the lane over the way round the corner

which if he was here would tell you that he has been seen a-speaking to him frequent).

Says the coroner, is that boy here? Says the beadle, no, sir, he is not here. Says the coroner, go and fetch him then. In the absence of the active and intelligent, the coroner converses with Mr. Tulkinghorn.

Oh! Here's the boy, gentlemen!

Here he is, very muddy, very hoarse, very ragged. Now, boy! But stop a minute. Caution. This boy must be put through a few preliminary paces.

Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heerd of sich a think. Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for HIM. HE don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. HE can't spell it. No father, no mother, no friends. Never been to school. What's home? Knows a broom's a broom, and knows it's wicked to tell a lie. Don't recollect who told him about the broom or about the lie, but knows both. Can't exactly say what'll be done to him arter he's dead if he tells a lie to the gentlemen here, but believes it'll be something wery bad to punish him, and serve him right—and so he'll tell the truth.

"This won't do, gentlemen!" says the coroner with a melancholy shake of the head.

"Don't you think you can receive his evidence, sir?" asks an attentive juryman.

"Out of the question," says the coroner. "You have heard the boy. 'Can't exactly say' won't do, you know. We can't take THAT in a court of justice, gentlemen. It's terrible depravity. Put the boy aside."

Boy put aside, to the great edification of the audience, especially of Little Swills, the comic vocalist.

Now. Is there any other witness? No other witness.

Very well, gentlemen! Here's a man unknown, proved to have been in the habit of taking opium in large quantities for a year and a half, found dead of too much opium. If you think you have any evidence to lead you to the conclusion that he committed suicide, you will come to that conclusion. If you think it is a case of accidental death, you will find a verdict accordingly.

Verdict accordingly. Accidental death. No doubt. Gentlemen, you are discharged. Good afternoon.

While the coroner buttons his great-coat, Mr. Tulkinghorn and he give

private audience to the rejected witness in a corner.

That graceless creature only knows that the dead man (whom he recognized just now by his yellow face and black hair) was sometimes hooted and pursued about the streets. That one cold winter night when he, the boy, was shivering in a doorway near his crossing, the man turned to look at him, and came back, and having questioned him and found that he had not a friend in the world, said, “Neither have I. Not one!” and gave him the price of a supper and a night’s lodging. That the man had often spoken to him since and asked him whether he slept sound at night, and how he bore cold and hunger, and whether he ever wished to die, and similar strange questions. That when the man had no money, he would say in passing, “I am as poor as you to-day, Jo,” but that when he had any, he had always (as the boy most heartily believes) been glad to give him some.

“He was wery good to me,” says the boy, wiping his eyes with his wretched sleeve. “Wen I see him a-layin’ so stritched out just now, I wished he could have heerd me tell him so. He wos wery good to me, he wos!”

As he shuffles downstairs, Mr. Snagsby, lying in wait for him, puts a half-crown in his hand. “If you ever see me coming past your crossing with my little woman—I mean a lady—” says Mr. Snagsby with his finger on his nose, “don’t allude to it!”

For some little time the jurymen hang about the Sol’s Arms colloquially. In the sequel, half-a-dozen are caught up in a cloud of pipe-smoke that pervades the parlour of the Sol’s Arms; two stroll to Hampstead; and four engage to go half-price to the play at night, and top up with oysters. Little Swills is treated on several hands. Being asked what he thinks of the proceedings, characterizes them (his strength lying in a slangular direction) as “a rummy start.” The landlord of the Sol’s Arms, finding Little Swills so popular, commends him highly to the jurymen and public, observing that for a song in character he don’t know his equal and that that man’s character-wardrobe would fill a cart.

Thus, gradually the Sol’s Arms melts into the shadowy night and then flares out of it strong in gas. The Harmonic Meeting hour arriving, the gentleman of professional celebrity takes the chair, is faced (red-faced) by Little Swills; their friends rally round them and support first-rate talent. In the zenith of the evening, Little Swills says, “Gentlemen, if you’ll permit me, I’ll attempt a short description of a scene of real life that came off here

to-day.” Is much applauded and encouraged; goes out of the room as Swills; comes in as the coroner (not the least in the world like him); describes the inquest, with recreative intervals of piano-forte accompaniment, to the refrain: With his (the coroner’s) tippy tol li doll, tippy tol lo doll, tippy tol li doll, Dee!

The jingling piano at last is silent, and the Harmonic friends rally round their pillows. Then there is rest around the lonely figure, now laid in its last earthly habitation; and it is watched by the gaunt eyes in the shutters through some quiet hours of night. If this forlorn man could have been prophetically seen lying here by the mother at whose breast he nestled, a little child, with eyes upraised to her loving face, and soft hand scarcely knowing how to close upon the neck to which it crept, what an impossibility the vision would have seemed! Oh, if in brighter days the now-extinguished fire within him ever burned for one woman who held him in her heart, where is she, while these ashes are above the ground!

It is anything but a night of rest at Mr. Snagsby’s, in Cook’s Court, where Guster murders sleep by going, as Mr. Snagsby himself allows—not to put too fine a point upon it—out of one fit into twenty. The occasion of this seizure is that Guster has a tender heart and a susceptible something that possibly might have been imagination, but for Tooting and her patron saint. Be it what it may, now, it was so direfully impressed at tea-time by Mr. Snagsby’s account of the inquiry at which he had assisted that at supper-time she projected herself into the kitchen, preceded by a flying Dutch cheese, and fell into a fit of unusual duration, which she only came out of to go into another, and another, and so on through a chain of fits, with short intervals between, of which she has pathetically availed herself by consuming them in entreaties to Mrs. Snagsby not to give her warning “when she quite comes to,” and also in appeals to the whole establishment to lay her down on the stones and go to bed. Hence, Mr. Snagsby, at last hearing the cock at the little dairy in Cursitor Street go into that disinterested ecstasy of his on the subject of daylight, says, drawing a long breath, though the most patient of men, “I thought you was dead, I am sure!”

What question this enthusiastic fowl supposes he settles when he strains himself to such an extent, or why he should thus crow (so men crow on various triumphant public occasions, however) about what cannot be of any

moment to him, is his affair. It is enough that daylight comes, morning comes, noon comes.

Then the active and intelligent, who has got into the morning papers as such, comes with his pauper company to Mr. Krook's and bears off the body of our dear brother here departed to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed, while our dear brothers and sisters who hang about official back-stairs—would to heaven they HAD departed!—are very complacent and agreeable. Into a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination and a Caffre would shudder at, they bring our dear brother here departed to receive Christian burial.

With houses looking on, on every side, save where a reeking little tunnel of a court gives access to the iron gate—with every villainy of life in action close on death, and every poisonous element of death in action close on life—here they lower our dear brother down a foot or two, here sow him in corruption, to be raised in corruption: an avenging ghost at many a sick-bedside, a shameful testimony to future ages how civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together.

Come night, come darkness, for you cannot come too soon or stay too long by such a place as this! Come, straggling lights into the windows of the ugly houses; and you who do iniquity therein, do it at least with this dread scene shut out! Come, flame of gas, burning so sullenly above the iron gate, on which the poisoned air deposits its witch-ointment slimy to the touch! It is well that you should call to every passerby, "Look here!"

With the night comes a slouching figure through the tunnel-court to the outside of the iron gate. It holds the gate with its hands and looks in between the bars, stands looking in for a little while.

It then, with an old broom it carries, softly sweeps the step and makes the archway clean. It does so very busily and trimly, looks in again a little while, and so departs.

Jo, is it thou? Well, well! Though a rejected witness, who "can't exactly say" what will be done to him in greater hands than men's, thou art not quite in outer darkness. There is something like a distant ray of light in thy muttered reason for this: "He wos wery good to me, he wos!"

CHAPTER XII

On the Watch

IT HAS LEFT OFF raining down in Lincolnshire at last, and Chesney Wold has taken heart. Mrs. Rouncewell is full of hospitable cares, for Sir Leicester and my Lady are coming home from Paris. The fashionable intelligence has found it out and communicates the glad tidings to benighted England. It has also found out that they will entertain a brilliant and distinguished circle of the ELITE of the BEAU MONDE (the fashionable intelligence is weak in English, but a giant refreshed in French) at the ancient and hospitable family seat in Lincolnshire.

For the greater honour of the brilliant and distinguished circle, and of Chesney Wold into the bargain, the broken arch of the bridge in the park is mended; and the water, now retired within its proper limits and again spanned gracefully, makes a figure in the prospect from the house. The clear, cold sunshine glances into the brittle woods and approvingly beholds the sharp wind scattering the leaves and drying the moss. It glides over the park after the moving shadows of the clouds, and chases them, and never catches them, all day. It looks in at the windows and touches the ancestral portraits with bars and patches of brightness never contemplated by the painters. Athwart the picture of my Lady, over the great chimney-piece, it throws a broad bend-sinister of light that strikes down crookedly into the hearth and seems to rend it.

Through the same cold sunshine and the same sharp wind, my Lady and Sir Leicester, in their travelling chariot (my Lady’s woman and Sir Leicester’s man affectionate in the rumble), start for home. With a considerable amount of jingling and whip-cracking, and many plunging demonstrations on the part of two bare-backed horses and two centaurs with glazed hats, jack-boots, and flowing manes and tails, they rattle out of the yard of the Hotel Bristol in the Place Vendome and canter between the sun-and-shadow-chequered colonnade of the Rue de Rivoli and the garden of the ill-fated palace of a headless king and queen, off by the Place of

Concord, and the Elysian Fields, and the Gate of the Star, out of Paris.

Sooth to say, they cannot go away too fast, for even here my Lady Dedlock has been bored to death. Concert, assembly, opera, theatre, drive, nothing is new to my Lady under the worn-out heavens. Only last Sunday, when poor wretches were gay—within the walls playing with children among the clipped trees and the statues in the Palace Garden; walking, a score abreast, in the Elysian Fields, made more Elysian by performing dogs and wooden horses; between whiles filtering (a few) through the gloomy Cathedral of Our Lady to say a word or two at the base of a pillar within flare of a rusty little gridiron-full of gusty little tapers; without the walls encompassing Paris with dancing, love-making, wine-drinking, tobacco-smoking, tomb-visiting, billiard card and domino playing, quack-doctoring, and much murderous refuse, animate and inanimate—only last Sunday, my Lady, in the desolation of Boredom and the clutch of Giant Despair, almost hated her own maid for being in spirits.

She cannot, therefore, go too fast from Paris. Weariness of soul lies before her, as it lies behind—her Ariel has put a girdle of it round the whole earth, and it cannot be unclasped—but the imperfect remedy is always to fly from the last place where it has been experienced. Fling Paris back into the distance, then, exchanging it for endless avenues and cross-avenues of wintry trees! And, when next beheld, let it be some leagues away, with the Gate of the Star a white speck glittering in the sun, and the city a mere mound in a plain—two dark square towers rising out of it, and light and shadow descending on it aslant, like the angels in Jacob’s dream!

Sir Leicester is generally in a complacent state, and rarely bored. When he has nothing else to do, he can always contemplate his own greatness. It is a considerable advantage to a man to have so inexhaustible a subject. After reading his letters, he leans back in his corner of the carriage and generally reviews his importance to society.

“You have an unusual amount of correspondence this morning?” says my Lady after a long time. She is fatigued with reading. Has almost read a page in twenty miles.

“Nothing in it, though. Nothing whatever.”

“I saw one of Mr. Tulkinghorn’s long effusions, I think?”

“You see everything,” says Sir Leicester with admiration.

“Ha!” sighs my Lady. “He is the most tiresome of men!”

“He sends—I really beg your pardon—he sends,” says Sir Leicester, selecting the letter and unfolding it, “a message to you. Our stopping to change horses as I came to his postscript drove it out of my memory. I beg you’ll excuse me. He says—” Sir Leicester is so long in taking out his eye-glass and adjusting it that my Lady looks a little irritated. “He says ‘In the matter of the right of way—’ I beg your pardon, that’s not the place. He says—yes! Here I have it! He says, ‘I beg my respectful compliments to my Lady, who, I hope, has benefited by the change. Will you do me the favour to mention (as it may interest her) that I have something to tell her on her return in reference to the person who copied the affidavit in the Chancery suit, which so powerfully stimulated her curiosity. I have seen him.’”

My Lady, leaning forward, looks out of her window.

“That’s the message,” observes Sir Leicester.

“I should like to walk a little,” says my Lady, still looking out of her window.

“Walk?” repeats Sir Leicester in a tone of surprise.

“I should like to walk a little,” says my Lady with unmistakable distinctness. “Please to stop the carriage.”

The carriage is stopped, the affectionate man alights from the rumble, opens the door, and lets down the steps, obedient to an impatient motion of my Lady’s hand. My Lady alights so quickly and walks away so quickly that Sir Leicester, for all his scrupulous politeness, is unable to assist her, and is left behind. A space of a minute or two has elapsed before he comes up with her. She smiles, looks very handsome, takes his arm, lounges with him for a quarter of a mile, is very much bored, and resumes her seat in the carriage.

The rattle and clatter continue through the greater part of three days, with more or less of bell-jingling and whip-cracking, and more or less plunging of centaurs and bare-backed horses. Their courtly politeness to each other at the hotels where they tarry is the theme of general admiration. Though my Lord IS a little aged for my Lady, says Madame, the hostess of the Golden Ape, and though he might be her amiable father, one can see at a glance that they love each other. One observes my Lord with his white hair, standing, hat in hand, to help my Lady to and from the carriage. One observes my Lady, how recognisant of my Lord’s politeness, with an inclination of her gracious head and the concession of her so-genteel

fingers! It is ravishing!

The sea has no appreciation of great men, but knocks them about like the small fry. It is habitually hard upon Sir Leicester, whose countenance it greenly mottles in the manner of sage-cheese and in whose aristocratic system it effects a dismal revolution. It is the Radical of Nature to him. Nevertheless, his dignity gets over it after stopping to refit, and he goes on with my Lady for Chesney Wold, lying only one night in London on the way to Lincolnshire.

Through the same cold sunlight, colder as the day declines, and through the same sharp wind, sharper as the separate shadows of bare trees gloom together in the woods, and as the Ghost's Walk, touched at the western corner by a pile of fire in the sky, resigns itself to coming night, they drive into the park. The rooks, swinging in their lofty houses in the elm-tree avenue, seem to discuss the question of the occupancy of the carriage as it passes underneath, some agreeing that Sir Leicester and my Lady are come down, some arguing with malcontents who won't admit it, now all consenting to consider the question disposed of, now all breaking out again in violent debate, incited by one obstinate and drowsy bird who will persist in putting in a last contradictory croak. Leaving them to swing and caw, the travelling chariot rolls on to the house, where fires gleam warmly through some of the windows, though not through so many as to give an inhabited expression to the darkening mass of front. But the brilliant and distinguished circle will soon do that.

Mrs. Rouncewell is in attendance and receives Sir Leicester's customary shake of the hand with a profound curtsy.

"How do you do, Mrs. Rouncewell? I am glad to see you."

"I hope I have the honour of welcoming you in good health, Sir Leicester?"

"In excellent health, Mrs. Rouncewell."

"My Lady is looking charmingly well," says Mrs. Rouncewell with another curtsy.

My Lady signifies, without profuse expenditure of words, that she is as wearily well as she can hope to be.

But Rosa is in the distance, behind the housekeeper; and my Lady, who has not subdued the quickness of her observation, whatever else she may have conquered, asks, "Who is that girl?"

“A young scholar of mine, my Lady. Rosa.”

“Come here, Rosa!” Lady Dedlock beckons her, with even an appearance of interest. “Why, do you know how pretty you are, child?” she says, touching her shoulder with her two forefingers.

Rosa, very much abashed, says, “No, if you please, my Lady!” and glances up, and glances down, and don’t know where to look, but looks all the prettier.

“How old are you?”

“Nineteen, my Lady.”

“Nineteen,” repeats my Lady thoughtfully. “Take care they don’t spoil you by flattery.”

“Yes, my Lady.”

My Lady taps her dimpled cheek with the same delicate gloved fingers and goes on to the foot of the oak staircase, where Sir Leicester pauses for her as her knightly escort. A staring old Dedlock in a panel, as large as life and as dull, looks as if he didn’t know what to make of it, which was probably his general state of mind in the days of Queen Elizabeth.

That evening, in the housekeeper’s room, Rosa can do nothing but murmur Lady Dedlock’s praises. She is so affable, so graceful, so beautiful, so elegant; has such a sweet voice and such a thrilling touch that Rosa can feel it yet! Mrs. Rouncewell confirms all this, not without personal pride, reserving only the one point of affability. Mrs. Rouncewell is not quite sure as to that. Heaven forbid that she should say a syllable in dispraise of any member of that excellent family, above all, of my Lady, whom the whole world admires; but if my Lady would only be “a little more free,” not quite so cold and distant, Mrs. Rouncewell thinks she would be more affable.

“’Tis almost a pity,” Mrs. Rouncewell adds—only “almost” because it borders on impiety to suppose that anything could be better than it is, in such an express dispensation as the Dedlock affairs—“that my Lady has no family. If she had had a daughter now, a grown young lady, to interest her, I think she would have had the only kind of excellence she wants.”

“Might not that have made her still more proud, grandmother?” says Watt, who has been home and come back again, he is such a good grandson.

“More and most, my dear,” returns the housekeeper with dignity, “are words it’s not my place to use—nor so much as to hear—applied to any drawback on my Lady.”

“I beg your pardon, grandmother. But she is proud, is she not?”

“If she is, she has reason to be. The Dedlock family have always reason to be.”

“Well,” says Watt, “it’s to be hoped they line out of their prayer-books a certain passage for the common people about pride and vainglory. Forgive me, grandmother! Only a joke!”

“Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, my dear, are not fit subjects for joking.”

“Sir Leicester is no joke by any means,” says Watt, “and I humbly ask his pardon. I suppose, grandmother, that even with the family and their guests down here, there is no objection to my prolonging my stay at the Dedlock Arms for a day or two, as any other traveller might?”

“Surely, none in the world, child.”

“I am glad of that,” says Watt, “because I have an inexpressible desire to extend my knowledge of this beautiful neighbourhood.”

He happens to glance at Rosa, who looks down and is very shy indeed. But according to the old superstition, it should be Rosa’s ears that burn, and not her fresh bright cheeks, for my Lady’s maid is holding forth about her at this moment with surpassing energy.

My Lady’s maid is a Frenchwoman of two and thirty, from somewhere in the southern country about Avignon and Marseilles, a large-eyed brown woman with black hair who would be handsome but for a certain feline mouth and general uncomfortable tightness of face, rendering the jaws too eager and the skull too prominent. There is something indefinably keen and wan about her anatomy, and she has a watchful way of looking out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head which could be pleasantly dispensed with, especially when she is in an ill humour and near knives. Through all the good taste of her dress and little adornments, these objections so express themselves that she seems to go about like a very neat she-wolf imperfectly tamed. Besides being accomplished in all the knowledge appertaining to her post, she is almost an Englishwoman in her acquaintance with the language; consequently, she is in no want of words to shower upon Rosa for having attracted my Lady’s attention, and she pours them out with such grim ridicule as she sits at dinner that her companion, the affectionate man, is rather relieved when she arrives at the spoon stage of that performance.

Ha, ha, ha! She, Hortense, been in my Lady's service since five years and always kept at the distance, and this doll, this puppet, caressed—absolutely caressed—by my Lady on the moment of her arriving at the house! Ha, ha, ha! "And do you know how pretty you are, child?" "No, my Lady." You are right there! "And how old are you, child! And take care they do not spoil you by flattery, child!" Oh, how droll! It is the BEST thing altogether.

In short, it is such an admirable thing that Mademoiselle Hortense can't forget it; but at meals for days afterwards, even among her countrywomen and others attached in like capacity to the troop of visitors, relapses into silent enjoyment of the joke—an enjoyment expressed, in her own convivial manner, by an additional tightness of face, thin elongation of compressed lips, and sidewise look, which intense appreciation of humour is frequently reflected in my Lady's mirrors when my Lady is not among them.

All the mirrors in the house are brought into action now, many of them after a long blank. They reflect handsome faces, simpering faces, youthful faces, faces of threescore and ten that will not submit to be old; the entire collection of faces that have come to pass a January week or two at Chesney Wold, and which the fashionable intelligence, a mighty hunter before the Lord, hunts with a keen scent, from their breaking cover at the Court of St. James's to their being run down to death. The place in Lincolnshire is all alive. By day guns and voices are heard ringing in the woods, horsemen and carriages enliven the park roads, servants and hangers-on pervade the village and the Dedlock Arms. Seen by night from distant openings in the trees, the row of windows in the long drawing-room, where my Lady's picture hangs over the great chimney-piece, is like a row of jewels set in a black frame. On Sunday the chill little church is almost warmed by so much gallant company, and the general flavour of the Dedlock dust is quenched in delicate perfumes.

The brilliant and distinguished circle comprehends within it no contracted amount of education, sense, courage, honour, beauty, and virtue. Yet there is something a little wrong about it in despite of its immense advantages. What can it be?

Dandyism? There is no King George the Fourth now (more the pity) to set the dandy fashion; there are no clear-starched jack-towel neckcloths, no short-waisted coats, no false calves, no stays. There are no caricatures, now,

of effeminate exquisites so arrayed, swooning in opera boxes with excess of delight and being revived by other dainty creatures poking long-necked scent-bottles at their noses. There is no beau whom it takes four men at once to shake into his buckskins, or who goes to see all the executions, or who is troubled with the self-reproach of having once consumed a pea. But is there dandyism in the brilliant and distinguished circle notwithstanding, dandyism of a more mischievous sort, that has got below the surface and is doing less harmless things than jack-towelling itself and stopping its own digestion, to which no rational person need particularly object?

Why, yes. It cannot be disguised. There ARE at Chesney Wold this January week some ladies and gentlemen of the newest fashion, who have set up a dandyism—in religion, for instance. Who in mere lackadaisical want of an emotion have agreed upon a little dandy talk about the vulgar wanting faith in things in general, meaning in the things that have been tried and found wanting, as though a low fellow should unaccountably lose faith in a bad shilling after finding it out! Who would make the vulgar very picturesque and faithful by putting back the hands upon the clock of time and cancelling a few hundred years of history.

There are also ladies and gentlemen of another fashion, not so new, but very elegant, who have agreed to put a smooth glaze on the world and to keep down all its realities. For whom everything must be languid and pretty. Who have found out the perpetual stoppage. Who are to rejoice at nothing and be sorry for nothing. Who are not to be disturbed by ideas. On whom even the fine arts, attending in powder and walking backward like the Lord Chamberlain, must array themselves in the milliners' and tailors' patterns of past generations and be particularly careful not to be in earnest or to receive any impress from the moving age.

Then there is my Lord Boodle, of considerable reputation with his party, who has known what office is and who tells Sir Leicester Dedlock with much gravity, after dinner, that he really does not see to what the present age is tending. A debate is not what a debate used to be; the House is not what the House used to be; even a Cabinet is not what it formerly was. He perceives with astonishment that supposing the present government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown, in the formation of a new ministry, would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle—supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle,

which may be assumed to be the case in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle? You can't offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle. You can't put him in the Woods and Forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle. What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost, and gone to pieces (as is made manifest to the patriotism of Sir Leicester Dedlock) because you can't provide for Noodle!

On the other hand, the Right Honourable William Buffy, M.P., contends across the table with some one else that the shipwreck of the country—about which there is no doubt; it is only the manner of it that is in question—is attributable to Cuffy. If you had done with Cuffy what you ought to have done when he first came into Parliament, and had prevented him from going over to Duffy, you would have got him into alliance with Fuffy, you would have had with you the weight attaching as a smart debater to Guffy, you would have brought to bear upon the elections the wealth of Huffy, you would have got in for three counties Juffy, Kuffy, and Luffy, and you would have strengthened your administration by the official knowledge and the business habits of Muffy. All this, instead of being as you now are, dependent on the mere caprice of Puffy!

As to this point, and as to some minor topics, there are differences of opinion; but it is perfectly clear to the brilliant and distinguished circle, all round, that nobody is in question but Boodle and his retinue, and Buffy and HIS retinue. These are the great actors for whom the stage is reserved. A People there are, no doubt—a certain large number of supernumeraries, who are to be occasionally addressed, and relied upon for shouts and choruses, as on the theatrical stage; but Boodle and Buffy, their followers and families, their heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, are the born first-actors, managers, and leaders, and no others can appear upon the scene for ever and ever.

In this, too, there is perhaps more dandyism at Chesney Wold than the brilliant and distinguished circle will find good for itself in the long run. For it is, even with the stillest and politest circles, as with the circle the necromancer draws around him—very strange appearances may be seen in active motion outside. With this difference, that being realities and not

phantoms, there is the greater danger of their breaking in.

Chesney Wold is quite full anyhow, so full that a burning sense of injury arises in the breasts of ill-lodged ladies'-maids, and is not to be extinguished. Only one room is empty. It is a turret chamber of the third order of merit, plainly but comfortably furnished and having an old-fashioned business air. It is Mr. Tulkinghorn's room, and is never bestowed on anybody else, for he may come at any time. He is not come yet. It is his quiet habit to walk across the park from the village in fine weather, to drop into this room as if he had never been out of it since he was last seen there, to request a servant to inform Sir Leicester that he is arrived in case he should be wanted, and to appear ten minutes before dinner in the shadow of the library-door. He sleeps in his turret with a complaining flag-staff over his head, and has some leads outside on which, any fine morning when he is down here, his black figure may be seen walking before breakfast like a larger species of rook.

Every day before dinner, my Lady looks for him in the dusk of the library, but he is not there. Every day at dinner, my Lady glances down the table for the vacant place that would be waiting to receive him if he had just arrived, but there is no vacant place. Every night my Lady casually asks her maid, "Is Mr. Tulkinghorn come?"

Every night the answer is, "No, my Lady, not yet."

One night, while having her hair undressed, my Lady loses herself in deep thought after this reply until she sees her own brooding face in the opposite glass, and a pair of black eyes curiously observing her.

"Be so good as to attend," says my Lady then, addressing the reflection of Hortense, "to your business. You can contemplate your beauty at another time."

"Pardon! It was your Ladyship's beauty."

"That," says my Lady, "you needn't contemplate at all."

At length, one afternoon a little before sunset, when the bright groups of figures which have for the last hour or two enlivened the Ghost's Walk are all dispersed and only Sir Leicester and my Lady remain upon the terrace, Mr. Tulkinghorn appears. He comes towards them at his usual methodical pace, which is never quickened, never slackened. He wears his usual expressionless mask—if it be a mask—and carries family secrets in every limb of his body and every crease of his dress. Whether his whole soul is

devoted to the great or whether he yields them nothing beyond the services he sells is his personal secret. He keeps it, as he keeps the secrets of his clients; he is his own client in that matter, and will never betray himself.

"How do you do, Mr. Tulkinghorn?" says Sir Leicester, giving him his hand.

Mr. Tulkinghorn is quite well. Sir Leicester is quite well. My Lady is quite well. All highly satisfactory. The lawyer, with his hands behind him, walks at Sir Leicester's side along the terrace. My Lady walks upon the other side.

"We expected you before," says Sir Leicester. A gracious observation. As much as to say, "Mr. Tulkinghorn, we remember your existence when you are not here to remind us of it by your presence. We bestow a fragment of our minds upon you, sir, you see!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn, comprehending it, inclines his head and says he is much obliged.

"I should have come down sooner," he explains, "but that I have been much engaged with those matters in the several suits between yourself and Boythorn."

"A man of a very ill-regulated mind," observes Sir Leicester with severity. "An extremely dangerous person in any community. A man of a very low character of mind."

"He is obstinate," says Mr. Tulkinghorn.

"It is natural to such a man to be so," says Sir Leicester, looking most profoundly obstinate himself. "I am not at all surprised to hear it."

"The only question is," pursues the lawyer, "whether you will give up anything."

"No, sir," replies Sir Leicester. "Nothing. I give up?"

"I don't mean anything of importance. That, of course, I know you would not abandon. I mean any minor point."

"Mr. Tulkinghorn," returns Sir Leicester, "there can be no minor point between myself and Mr. Boythorn. If I go farther, and observe that I cannot readily conceive how ANY right of mine can be a minor point, I speak not so much in reference to myself as an individual as in reference to the family position I have it in charge to maintain."

Mr. Tulkinghorn inclines his head again. "I have now my instructions," he says. "Mr. Boythorn will give us a good deal of trouble—"

“It is the character of such a mind, Mr. Tulkinghorn,” Sir Leicester interrupts him, “TO give trouble. An exceedingly ill-conditioned, levelling person. A person who, fifty years ago, would probably have been tried at the Old Bailey for some demagogue proceeding, and severely punished—if not,” adds Sir Leicester after a moment’s pause, “if not hanged, drawn, and quartered.”

Sir Leicester appears to discharge his stately breast of a burden in passing this capital sentence, as if it were the next satisfactory thing to having the sentence executed.

“But night is coming on,” says he, “and my Lady will take cold. My dear, let us go in.”

As they turn towards the hall-door, Lady Dedlock addresses Mr. Tulkinghorn for the first time.

“You sent me a message respecting the person whose writing I happened to inquire about. It was like you to remember the circumstance; I had quite forgotten it. Your message reminded me of it again. I can’t imagine what association I had with a hand like that, but I surely had some.”

“You had some?” Mr. Tulkinghorn repeats.

“Oh, yes!” returns my Lady carelessly. “I think I must have had some. And did you really take the trouble to find out the writer of that actual thing—what is it!—affidavit?”

“Yes.”

“How very odd!”

They pass into a sombre breakfast-room on the ground floor, lighted in the day by two deep windows. It is now twilight. The fire glows brightly on the panelled wall and palely on the window-glass, where, through the cold reflection of the blaze, the colder landscape shudders in the wind and a grey mist creeps along, the only traveller besides the waste of clouds.

My Lady lounges in a great chair in the chimney-corner, and Sir Leicester takes another great chair opposite. The lawyer stands before the fire with his hand out at arm’s length, shading his face. He looks across his arm at my Lady.

“Yes,” he says, “I inquired about the man, and found him. And, what is very strange, I found him—”

“Not to be any out-of-the-way person, I am afraid!” Lady Dedlock languidly anticipates.

“I found him dead.”

“Oh, dear me!” remonstrated Sir Leicester. Not so much shocked by the fact as by the fact of the fact being mentioned.

“I was directed to his lodging—a miserable, poverty-stricken place—and I found him dead.”

“You will excuse me, Mr. Tulkinghorn,” observes Sir Leicester. “I think the less said—”

“Pray, Sir Leicester, let me hear the story out” (it is my Lady speaking). “It is quite a story for twilight. How very shocking! Dead?”

Mr. Tulkinghorn re-asserts it by another inclination of his head. “Whether by his own hand—”

“Upon my honour!” cries Sir Leicester. “Really!”

“Do let me hear the story!” says my Lady.

“Whatever you desire, my dear. But, I must say—”

“No, you mustn’t say! Go on, Mr. Tulkinghorn.”

Sir Leicester’s gallantry concedes the point, though he still feels that to bring this sort of squalor among the upper classes is really—really—

“I was about to say,” resumes the lawyer with undisturbed calmness, “that whether he had died by his own hand or not, it was beyond my power to tell you. I should amend that phrase, however, by saying that he had unquestionably died of his own act, though whether by his own deliberate intention or by mischance can never certainly be known. The coroner’s jury found that he took the poison accidentally.”

“And what kind of man,” my Lady asks, “was this deplorable creature?”

“Very difficult to say,” returns the lawyer, shaking his head. “He had lived so wretchedly and was so neglected, with his gipsy colour and his wild black hair and beard, that I should have considered him the commonest of the common. The surgeon had a notion that he had once been something better, both in appearance and condition.”

“What did they call the wretched being?”

“They called him what he had called himself, but no one knew his name.”

“Not even any one who had attended on him?”

“No one had attended on him. He was found dead. In fact, I found him.”

“Without any clue to anything more?”

“Without any; there was,” says the lawyer meditatively, “an old

portmanteau, but—No, there were no papers."

During the utterance of every word of this short dialogue, Lady Dedlock and Mr. Tulkinghorn, without any other alteration in their customary deportment, have looked very steadily at one another—as was natural, perhaps, in the discussion of so unusual a subject. Sir Leicester has looked at the fire, with the general expression of the Dedlock on the staircase. The story being told, he renews his stately protest, saying that as it is quite clear that no association in my Lady's mind can possibly be traceable to this poor wretch (unless he was a begging-letter writer), he trusts to hear no more about a subject so far removed from my Lady's station.

"Certainly, a collection of horrors," says my Lady, gathering up her mantles and furs, "but they interest one for the moment! Have the kindness, Mr. Tulkinghorn, to open the door for me."

Mr. Tulkinghorn does so with deference and holds it open while she passes out. She passes close to him, with her usual fatigued manner and insolent grace. They meet again at dinner—again, next day—again, for many days in succession. Lady Dedlock is always the same exhausted deity, surrounded by worshippers, and terribly liable to be bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine. Mr. Tulkinghorn is always the same speechless repository of noble confidences, so oddly out of place and yet so perfectly at home. They appear to take as little note of one another as any two people enclosed within the same walls could. But whether each evermore watches and suspects the other, evermore mistrustful of some great reservation; whether each is evermore prepared at all points for the other, and never to be taken unawares; what each would give to know how much the other knows—all this is hidden, for the time, in their own hearts.

CHAPTER XIII

Esther’s Narrative

WE HELD MANY CONSULTATIONS about what Richard was to be, first without Mr. Jarndyce, as he had requested, and afterwards with him, but it was a long time before we seemed to make progress. Richard said he was ready for anything. When Mr. Jarndyce doubted whether he might not already be too old to enter the Navy, Richard said he had thought of that, and perhaps he was. When Mr. Jarndyce asked him what he thought of the Army, Richard said he had thought of that, too, and it wasn’t a bad idea. When Mr. Jarndyce advised him to try and decide within himself whether his old preference for the sea was an ordinary boyish inclination or a strong impulse, Richard answered, Well he really HAD tried very often, and he couldn’t make out.

“How much of this indecision of character,” Mr. Jarndyce said to me, “is chargeable on that incomprehensible heap of uncertainty and procrastination on which he has been thrown from his birth, I don’t pretend to say; but that Chancery, among its other sins, is responsible for some of it, I can plainly see. It has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off—and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance—and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused. The character of much older and steadier people may be even changed by the circumstances surrounding them. It would be too much to expect that a boy’s, in its formation, should be the subject of such influences and escape them.”

I felt this to be true; though if I may venture to mention what I thought besides, I thought it much to be regretted that Richard’s education had not counteracted those influences or directed his character. He had been eight years at a public school and had learnt, I understood, to make Latin verses of several sorts in the most admirable manner. But I never heard that it had been anybody’s business to find out what his natural bent was, or where his failings lay, or to adapt any kind of knowledge to HIM. HE had been adapted

to the verses and had learnt the art of making them to such perfection that if he had remained at school until he was of age, I suppose he could only have gone on making them over and over again unless he had enlarged his education by forgetting how to do it. Still, although I had no doubt that they were very beautiful, and very improving, and very sufficient for a great many purposes of life, and always remembered all through life, I did doubt whether Richard would not have profited by some one studying him a little, instead of his studying them quite so much.

To be sure, I knew nothing of the subject and do not even now know whether the young gentlemen of classic Rome or Greece made verses to the same extent—or whether the young gentlemen of any country ever did.

"I haven't the least idea," said Richard, musing, "what I had better be. Except that I am quite sure I don't want to go into the Church, it's a toss-up."

"You have no inclination in Mr. Kenge's way?" suggested Mr. Jarndyce.

"I don't know that, sir!" replied Richard. "I am fond of boating. Articled clerks go a good deal on the water. It's a capital profession!"

"Surgeon—" suggested Mr. Jarndyce.

"That's the thing, sir!" cried Richard.

I doubt if he had ever once thought of it before.

"That's the thing, sir," repeated Richard with the greatest enthusiasm. "We have got it at last. M.R.C.S.!"

He was not to be laughed out of it, though he laughed at it heartily. He said he had chosen his profession, and the more he thought of it, the more he felt that his destiny was clear; the art of healing was the art of all others for him. Mistrusting that he only came to this conclusion because, having never had much chance of finding out for himself what he was fitted for and having never been guided to the discovery, he was taken by the newest idea and was glad to get rid of the trouble of consideration, I wondered whether the Latin verses often ended in this or whether Richard's was a solitary case.

Mr. Jarndyce took great pains to talk with him seriously and to put it to his good sense not to deceive himself in so important a matter. Richard was a little grave after these interviews, but invariably told Ada and me that it was all right, and then began to talk about something else.

"By heaven!" cried Mr. Boythorn, who interested himself strongly in the

subject—though I need not say that, for he could do nothing weakly; “I rejoice to find a young gentleman of spirit and gallantry devoting himself to that noble profession! The more spirit there is in it, the better for mankind and the worse for those mercenary task-masters and low tricksters who delight in putting that illustrious art at a disadvantage in the world. By all that is base and despicable,” cried Mr. Boythorn, “the treatment of surgeons aboard ship is such that I would submit the legs—both legs—of every member of the Admiralty Board to a compound fracture and render it a transportable offence in any qualified practitioner to set them if the system were not wholly changed in eight and forty hours!”

“Wouldn’t you give them a week?” asked Mr. Jarndyce.

“No!” cried Mr. Boythorn firmly. “Not on any consideration! Eight and forty hours! As to corporations, parishes, vestry-boards, and similar gatherings of jolter-headed clods who assemble to exchange such speeches that, by heaven, they ought to be worked in quicksilver mines for the short remainder of their miserable existence, if it were only to prevent their detestable English from contaminating a language spoken in the presence of the sun—as to those fellows, who meanly take advantage of the ardour of gentlemen in the pursuit of knowledge to recompense the inestimable services of the best years of their lives, their long study, and their expensive education with pittances too small for the acceptance of clerks, I would have the necks of every one of them wrung and their skulls arranged in Surgeons’ Hall for the contemplation of the whole profession in order that its younger members might understand from actual measurement, in early life, HOW thick skulls may become!”

He wound up this vehement declaration by looking round upon us with a most agreeable smile and suddenly thundering, “Ha, ha, ha!” over and over again, until anybody else might have been expected to be quite subdued by the exertion.

As Richard still continued to say that he was fixed in his choice after repeated periods for consideration had been recommended by Mr. Jarndyce and had expired, and he still continued to assure Ada and me in the same final manner that it was “all right,” it became advisable to take Mr. Kenge into council. Mr. Kenge, therefore, came down to dinner one day, and leaned back in his chair, and turned his eye-glasses over and over, and spoke in a sonorous voice, and did exactly what I remembered to have seen

him do when I was a little girl.

“Ah!” said Mr. Kenge. “Yes. Well! A very good profession, Mr. Jarndyce, a very good profession.”

“The course of study and preparation requires to be diligently pursued,” observed my guardian with a glance at Richard.

“Oh, no doubt,” said Mr. Kenge. “Diligently.”

“But that being the case, more or less, with all pursuits that are worth much,” said Mr. Jarndyce, “it is not a special consideration which another choice would be likely to escape.”

“Truly,” said Mr. Kenge. “And Mr. Richard Carstone, who has so meritoriously acquitted himself in the—shall I say the classic shades?—in which his youth had been passed, will, no doubt, apply the habits, if not the principles and practice, of versification in that tongue in which a poet was said (unless I mistake) to be born, not made, to the more eminently practical field of action on which he enters.”

“You may rely upon it,” said Richard in his off-hand manner, “that I shall go at it and do my best.”

“Very well, Mr. Jarndyce!” said Mr. Kenge, gently nodding his head. “Really, when we are assured by Mr. Richard that he means to go at it and to do his best,” nodding feelingly and smoothly over those expressions, “I would submit to you that we have only to inquire into the best mode of carrying out the object of his ambition. Now, with reference to placing Mr. Richard with some sufficiently eminent practitioner. Is there any one in view at present?”

“No one, Rick, I think?” said my guardian.

“No one, sir,” said Richard.

“Quite so!” observed Mr. Kenge. “As to situation, now. Is there any particular feeling on that head?”

“N—no,” said Richard.

“Quite so!” observed Mr. Kenge again.

“I should like a little variety,” said Richard; “I mean a good range of experience.”

“Very requisite, no doubt,” returned Mr. Kenge. “I think this may be easily arranged, Mr. Jarndyce? We have only, in the first place, to discover a sufficiently eligible practitioner; and as soon as we make our want—and shall I add, our ability to pay a premium?—known, our only difficulty will

be in the selection of one from a large number. We have only, in the second place, to observe those little formalities which are rendered necessary by our time of life and our being under the guardianship of the court. We shall soon be—shall I say, in Mr. Richard's own light-hearted manner, 'going at it'—to our heart's content. It is a coincidence," said Mr. Kenge with a tinge of melancholy in his smile, "one of those coincidences which may or may not require an explanation beyond our present limited faculties, that I have a cousin in the medical profession. He might be deemed eligible by you and might be disposed to respond to this proposal. I can answer for him as little as for you, but he MIGHT!"

As this was an opening in the prospect, it was arranged that Mr. Kenge should see his cousin. And as Mr. Jarndyce had before proposed to take us to London for a few weeks, it was settled next day that we should make our visit at once and combine Richard's business with it.

Mr. Boythorn leaving us within a week, we took up our abode at a cheerful lodging near Oxford Street over an upholsterer's shop. London was a great wonder to us, and we were out for hours and hours at a time, seeing the sights, which appeared to be less capable of exhaustion than we were. We made the round of the principal theatres, too, with great delight, and saw all the plays that were worth seeing. I mention this because it was at the theatre that I began to be made uncomfortable again by Mr. Guppy.

I was sitting in front of the box one night with Ada, and Richard was in the place he liked best, behind Ada's chair, when, happening to look down into the pit, I saw Mr. Guppy, with his hair flattened down upon his head and woe depicted in his face, looking up at me. I felt all through the performance that he never looked at the actors but constantly looked at me, and always with a carefully prepared expression of the deepest misery and the profoundest dejection.

It quite spoiled my pleasure for that night because it was so very embarrassing and so very ridiculous. But from that time forth, we never went to the play without my seeing Mr. Guppy in the pit, always with his hair straight and flat, his shirt-collar turned down, and a general feebleness about him. If he were not there when we went in, and I began to hope he would not come and yielded myself for a little while to the interest of the scene, I was certain to encounter his languishing eyes when I least expected it and, from that time, to be quite sure that they were fixed upon me all the

evening.

I really cannot express how uneasy this made me. If he would only have brushed up his hair or turned up his collar, it would have been bad enough; but to know that that absurd figure was always gazing at me, and always in that demonstrative state of despondency, put such a constraint upon me that I did not like to laugh at the play, or to cry at it, or to move, or to speak. I seemed able to do nothing naturally. As to escaping Mr. Guppy by going to the back of the box, I could not bear to do that because I knew Richard and Ada relied on having me next them and that they could never have talked together so happily if anybody else had been in my place. So there I sat, not knowing where to look—for wherever I looked, I knew Mr. Guppy's eyes were following me—and thinking of the dreadful expense to which this young man was putting himself on my account.

Sometimes I thought of telling Mr. Jarndyce. Then I feared that the young man would lose his situation and that I might ruin him. Sometimes I thought of confiding in Richard, but was deterred by the possibility of his fighting Mr. Guppy and giving him black eyes. Sometimes I thought, should I frown at him or shake my head. Then I felt I could not do it. Sometimes I considered whether I should write to his mother, but that ended in my being convinced that to open a correspondence would be to make the matter worse. I always came to the conclusion, finally, that I could do nothing. Mr. Guppy's perseverance, all this time, not only produced him regularly at any theatre to which we went, but caused him to appear in the crowd as we were coming out, and even to get up behind our fly—where I am sure I saw him, two or three times, struggling among the most dreadful spikes. After we got home, he haunted a post opposite our house. The upholsterer's where we lodged being at the corner of two streets, and my bedroom window being opposite the post, I was afraid to go near the window when I went upstairs, lest I should see him (as I did one moonlight night) leaning against the post and evidently catching cold. If Mr. Guppy had not been, fortunately for me, engaged in the daytime, I really should have had no rest from him.

While we were making this round of gaieties, in which Mr. Guppy so extraordinarily participated, the business which had helped to bring us to town was not neglected. Mr. Kenge's cousin was a Mr. Bayham Badger, who had a good practice at Chelsea and attended a large public institution

besides. He was quite willing to receive Richard into his house and to superintend his studies, and as it seemed that those could be pursued advantageously under Mr. Badger's roof, and Mr. Badger liked Richard, and as Richard said he liked Mr. Badger "well enough," an agreement was made, the Lord Chancellor's consent was obtained, and it was all settled.

On the day when matters were concluded between Richard and Mr. Badger, we were all under engagement to dine at Mr. Badger's house. We were to be "merely a family party," Mrs. Badger's note said; and we found no lady there but Mrs. Badger herself. She was surrounded in the drawing-room by various objects, indicative of her painting a little, playing the piano a little, playing the guitar a little, playing the harp a little, singing a little, working a little, reading a little, writing poetry a little, and botanizing a little. She was a lady of about fifty, I should think, youthfully dressed, and of a very fine complexion. If I add to the little list of her accomplishments that she rouged a little, I do not mean that there was any harm in it.

Mr. Bayham Badger himself was a pink, fresh-faced, crisp-looking gentleman with a weak voice, white teeth, light hair, and surprised eyes, some years younger, I should say, than Mrs. Bayham Badger. He admired her exceedingly, but principally, and to begin with, on the curious ground (as it seemed to us) of her having had three husbands. We had barely taken our seats when he said to Mr. Jarndyce quite triumphantly, "You would hardly suppose that I am Mrs. Bayham Badger's third!"

"Indeed?" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Her third!" said Mr. Badger. "Mrs. Bayham Badger has not the appearance, Miss Summerson, of a lady who has had two former husbands?"

I said "Not at all!"

"And most remarkable men!" said Mr. Badger in a tone of confidence. "Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy, who was Mrs. Badger's first husband, was a very distinguished officer indeed. The name of Professor Dingo, my immediate predecessor, is one of European reputation."

Mrs. Badger overheard him and smiled.

"Yes, my dear!" Mr. Badger replied to the smile, "I was observing to Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Summerson that you had had two former husbands—both very distinguished men. And they found it, as people generally do, difficult to believe."

“I was barely twenty,” said Mrs. Badger, “when I married Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy. I was in the Mediterranean with him; I am quite a sailor. On the twelfth anniversary of my wedding-day, I became the wife of Professor Dingo.”

“Of European reputation,” added Mr. Badger in an undertone.

“And when Mr. Badger and myself were married,” pursued Mrs. Badger, “we were married on the same day of the year. I had become attached to the day.”

“So that Mrs. Badger has been married to three husbands—two of them highly distinguished men,” said Mr. Badger, summing up the facts, “and each time upon the twenty-first of March at eleven in the forenoon!”

We all expressed our admiration.

“But for Mr. Badger’s modesty,” said Mr. Jarndyce, “I would take leave to correct him and say three distinguished men.”

“Thank you, Mr. Jarndyce! What I always tell him!” observed Mrs. Badger.

“And, my dear,” said Mr. Badger, “what do I always tell you? That without any affectation of disparaging such professional distinction as I may have attained (which our friend Mr. Carstone will have many opportunities of estimating), I am not so weak—no, really,” said Mr. Badger to us generally, “so unreasonable—as to put my reputation on the same footing with such first-rate men as Captain Swosser and Professor Dingo. Perhaps you may be interested, Mr. Jarndyce,” continued Mr. Bayham Badger, leading the way into the next drawing-room, “in this portrait of Captain Swosser. It was taken on his return home from the African station, where he had suffered from the fever of the country. Mrs. Badger considers it too yellow. But it’s a very fine head. A very fine head!”

We all echoed, “A very fine head!”

“I feel when I look at it,” said Mr. Badger, “‘That’s a man I should like to have seen!’ It strikingly bespeaks the first-class man that Captain Swosser pre-eminently was. On the other side, Professor Dingo. I knew him well—attended him in his last illness—a speaking likeness! Over the piano, Mrs. Bayham Badger when Mrs. Swosser. Over the sofa, Mrs. Bayham Badger when Mrs. Dingo. Of Mrs. Bayham Badger IN ESSE, I possess the original and have no copy.”

Dinner was now announced, and we went downstairs. It was a very

genteel entertainment, very handsomely served. But the captain and the professor still ran in Mr. Badger's head, and as Ada and I had the honour of being under his particular care, we had the full benefit of them.

"Water, Miss Summerson? Allow me! Not in that tumbler, pray. Bring me the professor's goblet, James!"

Ada very much admired some artificial flowers under a glass.

"Astonishing how they keep!" said Mr. Badger. "They were presented to Mrs. Bayham Badger when she was in the Mediterranean."

He invited Mr. Jarndyce to take a glass of claret.

"Not that claret!" he said. "Excuse me! This is an occasion, and ON an occasion I produce some very special claret I happen to have. (James, Captain Swosser's wine!) Mr. Jarndyce, this is a wine that was imported by the captain, we will not say how many years ago. You will find it very curious. My dear, I shall be happy to take some of this wine with you. (Captain Swosser's claret to your mistress, James!) My love, your health!"

After dinner, when we ladies retired, we took Mrs. Badger's first and second husband with us. Mrs. Badger gave us in the drawing-room a biographical sketch of the life and services of Captain Swosser before his marriage and a more minute account of him dating from the time when he fell in love with her at a ball on board the Crippler, given to the officers of that ship when she lay in Plymouth Harbour.

"The dear old Crippler!" said Mrs. Badger, shaking her head. "She was a noble vessel. Trim, ship-shape, all a taunto, as Captain Swosser used to say. You must excuse me if I occasionally introduce a nautical expression; I was quite a sailor once. Captain Swosser loved that craft for my sake. When she was no longer in commission, he frequently said that if he were rich enough to buy her old hulk, he would have an inscription let into the timbers of the quarter-deck where we stood as partners in the dance to mark the spot where he fell—raked fore and aft (Captain Swosser used to say) by the fire from my tops. It was his naval way of mentioning my eyes."

Mrs. Badger shook her head, sighed, and looked in the glass.

"It was a great change from Captain Swosser to Professor Dingo," she resumed with a plaintive smile. "I felt it a good deal at first. Such an entire revolution in my mode of life! But custom, combined with science—particularly science—inured me to it. Being the professor's sole companion in his botanical excursions, I almost forgot that I had ever been afloat, and

became quite learned. It is singular that the professor was the antipodes of Captain Swosser and that Mr. Badger is not in the least like either!”

We then passed into a narrative of the deaths of Captain Swosser and Professor Dingo, both of whom seem to have had very bad complaints. In the course of it, Mrs. Badger signified to us that she had never madly loved but once and that the object of that wild affection, never to be recalled in its fresh enthusiasm, was Captain Swosser. The professor was yet dying by inches in the most dismal manner, and Mrs. Badger was giving us imitations of his way of saying, with great difficulty, “Where is Laura? Let Laura give me my toast and water!” when the entrance of the gentlemen consigned him to the tomb.

Now, I observed that evening, as I had observed for some days past, that Ada and Richard were more than ever attached to each other’s society, which was but natural, seeing that they were going to be separated so soon. I was therefore not very much surprised when we got home, and Ada and I retired upstairs, to find Ada more silent than usual, though I was not quite prepared for her coming into my arms and beginning to speak to me, with her face hidden.

“My darling Esther!” murmured Ada. “I have a great secret to tell you!”

A mighty secret, my pretty one, no doubt!

“What is it, Ada?”

“Oh, Esther, you would never guess!”

“Shall I try to guess?” said I.

“Oh, no! Don’t! Pray don’t!” cried Ada, very much startled by the idea of my doing so.

“Now, I wonder who it can be about?” said I, pretending to consider.

“It’s about—” said Ada in a whisper. “It’s about—my cousin Richard!”

“Well, my own!” said I, kissing her bright hair, which was all I could see. “And what about him?”

“Oh, Esther, you would never guess!”

It was so pretty to have her clinging to me in that way, hiding her face, and to know that she was not crying in sorrow but in a little glow of joy, and pride, and hope, that I would not help her just yet.

“He says—I know it’s very foolish, we are both so young—but he says,” with a burst of tears, “that he loves me dearly, Esther.”

“Does he indeed?” said I. “I never heard of such a thing! Why, my pet of

pets, I could have told you that weeks and weeks ago!”

To see Ada lift up her flushed face in joyful surprise, and hold me round the neck, and laugh, and cry, and blush, was so pleasant!

“Why, my darling,” said I, “what a goose you must take me for! Your cousin Richard has been loving you as plainly as he could for I don’t know how long!”

“And yet you never said a word about it!” cried Ada, kissing me.

“No, my love,” said I. “I waited to be told.”

“But now I have told you, you don’t think it wrong of me, do you?” returned Ada. She might have coaxed me to say no if I had been the hardest-hearted duenna in the world. Not being that yet, I said no very freely.

“And now,” said I, “I know the worst of it.”

“Oh, that’s not quite the worst of it, Esther dear!” cried Ada, holding me tighter and laying down her face again upon my breast.

“No?” said I. “Not even that?”

“No, not even that!” said Ada, shaking her head.

“Why, you never mean to say—” I was beginning in joke.

But Ada, looking up and smiling through her tears, cried, “Yes, I do! You know, you know I do!” And then sobbed out, “With all my heart I do! With all my whole heart, Esther!”

I told her, laughing, why I had known that, too, just as well as I had known the other! And we sat before the fire, and I had all the talking to myself for a little while (though there was not much of it); and Ada was soon quiet and happy.

“Do you think my cousin John knows, dear Dame Durden?” she asked.

“Unless my cousin John is blind, my pet,” said I, “I should think my cousin John knows pretty well as much as we know.”

“We want to speak to him before Richard goes,” said Ada timidly, “and we wanted you to advise us, and to tell him so. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind Richard’s coming in, Dame Durden?”

“Oh! Richard is outside, is he, my dear?” said I.

“I am not quite certain,” returned Ada with a bashful simplicity that would have won my heart if she had not won it long before, “but I think he’s waiting at the door.”

There he was, of course. They brought a chair on either side of me, and

put me between them, and really seemed to have fallen in love with me instead of one another, they were so confiding, and so trustful, and so fond of me. They went on in their own wild way for a little while—I never stopped them; I enjoyed it too much myself—and then we gradually fell to considering how young they were, and how there must be a lapse of several years before this early love could come to anything, and how it could come to happiness only if it were real and lasting and inspired them with a steady resolution to do their duty to each other, with constancy, fortitude, and perseverance, each always for the other's sake. Well! Richard said that he would work his fingers to the bone for Ada, and Ada said that she would work her fingers to the bone for Richard, and they called me all sorts of endearing and sensible names, and we sat there, advising and talking, half the night. Finally, before we parted, I gave them my promise to speak to their cousin John to-morrow.

So, when to-morrow came, I went to my guardian after breakfast, in the room that was our town-substitute for the growlery, and told him that I had it in trust to tell him something.

"Well, little woman," said he, shutting up his book, "if you have accepted the trust, there can be no harm in it."

"I hope not, guardian," said I. "I can guarantee that there is no secrecy in it. For it only happened yesterday."

"Aye? And what is it, Esther?"

"Guardian," said I, "you remember the happy night when first we came down to Bleak House? When Ada was singing in the dark room?"

I wished to call to his remembrance the look he had given me then. Unless I am much mistaken, I saw that I did so.

"Because—" said I with a little hesitation.

"Yes, my dear!" said he. "Don't hurry."

"Because," said I, "Ada and Richard have fallen in love. And have told each other so."

"Already!" cried my guardian, quite astonished.

"Yes!" said I. "And to tell you the truth, guardian, I rather expected it."

"The deuce you did!" said he.

He sat considering for a minute or two, with his smile, at once so handsome and so kind, upon his changing face, and then requested me to let them know that he wished to see them. When they came, he encircled Ada

with one arm in his fatherly way and addressed himself to Richard with a cheerful gravity.

"Rick," said Mr. Jarndyce, "I am glad to have won your confidence. I hope to preserve it. When I contemplated these relations between us four which have so brightened my life and so invested it with new interests and pleasures, I certainly did contemplate, afar off, the possibility of you and your pretty cousin here (don't be shy, Ada, don't be shy, my dear!) being in a mind to go through life together. I saw, and do see, many reasons to make it desirable. But that was afar off, Rick, afar off!"

"We look afar off, sir," returned Richard.

"Well!" said Mr. Jarndyce. "That's rational. Now, hear me, my dears! I might tell you that you don't know your own minds yet, that a thousand things may happen to divert you from one another, that it is well this chain of flowers you have taken up is very easily broken, or it might become a chain of lead. But I will not do that. Such wisdom will come soon enough, I dare say, if it is to come at all. I will assume that a few years hence you will be in your hearts to one another what you are to-day. All I say before speaking to you according to that assumption is, if you DO change—if you DO come to find that you are more commonplace cousins to each other as man and woman than you were as boy and girl (your manhood will excuse me, Rick!)—don't be ashamed still to confide in me, for there will be nothing monstrous or uncommon in it. I am only your friend and distant kinsman. I have no power over you whatever. But I wish and hope to retain your confidence if I do nothing to forfeit it."

"I am very sure, sir," returned Richard, "that I speak for Ada too when I say that you have the strongest power over us both—rooted in respect, gratitude, and affection—strengthening every day."

"Dear cousin John," said Ada, on his shoulder, "my father's place can never be empty again. All the love and duty I could ever have rendered to him is transferred to you."

"Come!" said Mr. Jarndyce. "Now for our assumption. Now we lift our eyes up and look hopefully at the distance! Rick, the world is before you; and it is most probable that as you enter it, so it will receive you. Trust in nothing but in Providence and your own efforts. Never separate the two, like the heathen waggoner. Constancy in love is a good thing, but it means nothing, and is nothing, without constancy in every kind of effort. If you

had the abilities of all the great men, past and present, you could do nothing well without sincerely meaning it and setting about it. If you entertain the supposition that any real success, in great things or in small, ever was or could be, ever will or can be, wrested from Fortune by fits and starts, leave that wrong idea here or leave your cousin Ada here."

"I will leave IT here, sir," replied Richard smiling, "if I brought it here just now (but I hope I did not), and will work my way on to my cousin Ada in the hopeful distance."

"Right!" said Mr. Jarndyce. "If you are not to make her happy, why should you pursue her?"

"I wouldn't make her unhappy—no, not even for her love," retorted Richard proudly.

"Well said!" cried Mr. Jarndyce. "That's well said! She remains here, in her home with me. Love her, Rick, in your active life, no less than in her home when you revisit it, and all will go well. Otherwise, all will go ill. That's the end of my preaching. I think you and Ada had better take a walk."

Ada tenderly embraced him, and Richard heartily shook hands with him, and then the cousins went out of the room, looking back again directly, though, to say that they would wait for me.

The door stood open, and we both followed them with our eyes as they passed down the adjoining room, on which the sun was shining, and out at its farther end. Richard with his head bent, and her hand drawn through his arm, was talking to her very earnestly; and she looked up in his face, listening, and seemed to see nothing else. So young, so beautiful, so full of hope and promise, they went on lightly through the sunlight as their own happy thoughts might then be traversing the years to come and making them all years of brightness. So they passed away into the shadow and were gone. It was only a burst of light that had been so radiant. The room darkened as they went out, and the sun was clouded over.

"Am I right, Esther?" said my guardian when they were gone.

He was so good and wise to ask ME whether he was right!

"Rick may gain, out of this, the quality he wants. Wants, at the core of so much that is good!" said Mr. Jarndyce, shaking his head. "I have said nothing to Ada, Esther. She has her friend and counsellor always near." And he laid his hand lovingly upon my head.

I could not help showing that I was a little moved, though I did all I could to conceal it.

“Tut tut!” said he. “But we must take care, too, that our little woman’s life is not all consumed in care for others.”

“Care? My dear guardian, I believe I am the happiest creature in the world!”

“I believe so, too,” said he. “But some one may find out what Esther never will—that the little woman is to be held in remembrance above all other people!”

I have omitted to mention in its place that there was some one else at the family dinner party. It was not a lady. It was a gentleman. It was a gentleman of a dark complexion—a young surgeon. He was rather reserved, but I thought him very sensible and agreeable. At least, Ada asked me if I did not, and I said yes.

CHAPTER XIV

Deportment

RICHARD LEFT US ON the very next evening to begin his new career, and committed Ada to my charge with great love for her and great trust in me. It touched me then to reflect, and it touches me now, more nearly, to remember (having what I have to tell) how they both thought of me, even at that engrossing time. I was a part of all their plans, for the present and the future. I was to write Richard once a week, making my faithful report of Ada, who was to write to him every alternate day. I was to be informed, under his own hand, of all his labours and successes; I was to observe how resolute and persevering he would be; I was to be Ada's bridesmaid when they were married; I was to live with them afterwards; I was to keep all the keys of their house; I was to be made happy for ever and a day.

"And if the suit SHOULD make us rich, Esther—which it may, you know!" said Richard to crown all.

A shade crossed Ada's face.

"My dearest Ada," asked Richard, "why not?"

"It had better declare us poor at once," said Ada.

"Oh! I don't know about that," returned Richard, "but at all events, it won't declare anything at once. It hasn't declared anything in heaven knows how many years."

"Too true," said Ada.

"Yes, but," urged Richard, answering what her look suggested rather than her words, "the longer it goes on, dear cousin, the nearer it must be to a settlement one way or other. Now, is not that reasonable?"

"You know best, Richard. But I am afraid if we trust to it, it will make us unhappy."

"But, my Ada, we are not going to trust to it!" cried Richard gaily. "We know it better than to trust to it. We only say that if it SHOULD make us rich, we have no constitutional objection to being rich. The court is, by solemn settlement of law, our grim old guardian, and we are to suppose that what it

gives us (when it gives us anything) is our right. It is not necessary to quarrel with our right."

"No," said Ada, "but it may be better to forget all about it."

"Well, well," cried Richard, "then we will forget all about it! We consign the whole thing to oblivion. Dame Durden puts on her approving face, and it's done!"

"Dame Durden's approving face," said I, looking out of the box in which I was packing his books, "was not very visible when you called it by that name; but it does approve, and she thinks you can't do better."

So, Richard said there was an end of it, and immediately began, on no other foundation, to build as many castles in the air as would man the Great Wall of China. He went away in high spirits. Ada and I, prepared to miss him very much, commenced our quieter career.

On our arrival in London, we had called with Mr. Jarndyce at Mrs. Jellyby's but had not been so fortunate as to find her at home. It appeared that she had gone somewhere to a tea-drinking and had taken Miss Jellyby with her. Besides the tea-drinking, there was to be some considerable speech-making and letter-writing on the general merits of the cultivation of coffee, conjointly with natives, at the Settlement of Borrioboola-Gha. All this involved, no doubt, sufficient active exercise of pen and ink to make her daughter's part in the proceedings anything but a holiday.

It being now beyond the time appointed for Mrs. Jellyby's return, we called again. She was in town, but not at home, having gone to Mile End directly after breakfast on some Borrioboolan business, arising out of a society called the East London Branch Aid Ramification. As I had not seen Peepy on the occasion of our last call (when he was not to be found anywhere, and when the cook rather thought he must have strolled away with the dustman's cart), I now inquired for him again. The oyster shells he had been building a house with were still in the passage, but he was nowhere discoverable, and the cook supposed that he had "gone after the sheep." When we repeated, with some surprise, "The sheep?" she said, Oh, yes, on market days he sometimes followed them quite out of town and came back in such a state as never was!

I was sitting at the window with my guardian on the following morning, and Ada was busy writing—of course to Richard—when Miss Jellyby was announced, and entered, leading the identical Peepy, whom she had made

some endeavours to render presentable by wiping the dirt into corners of his face and hands and making his hair very wet and then violently frizzling it with her fingers. Everything the dear child wore was either too large for him or too small. Among his other contradictory decorations he had the hat of a bishop and the little gloves of a baby. His boots were, on a small scale, the boots of a ploughman, while his legs, so crossed and recrossed with scratches that they looked like maps, were bare below a very short pair of plaid drawers finished off with two frills of perfectly different patterns. The deficient buttons on his plaid frock had evidently been supplied from one of Mr. Jellyby's coats, they were so extremely brazen and so much too large. Most extraordinary specimens of needlework appeared on several parts of his dress, where it had been hastily mended, and I recognized the same hand on Miss Jellyby's. She was, however, unaccountably improved in her appearance and looked very pretty. She was conscious of poor little Peepy being but a failure after all her trouble, and she showed it as she came in by the way in which she glanced first at him and then at us.

"Oh, dear me!" said my guardian. "Due east!"

Ada and I gave her a cordial welcome and presented her to Mr. Jarndyce, to whom she said as she sat down, "Ma's compliments, and she hopes you'll excuse her, because she's correcting proofs of the plan. She's going to put out five thousand new circulars, and she knows you'll be interested to hear that. I have brought one of them with me. Ma's compliments." With which she presented it sulkily enough.

"Thank you," said my guardian. "I am much obliged to Mrs. Jellyby. Oh, dear me! This is a very trying wind!"

We were busy with Peepy, taking off his clerical hat, asking him if he remembered us, and so on. Peepy retired behind his elbow at first, but relented at the sight of sponge-cake and allowed me to take him on my lap, where he sat munching quietly. Mr. Jarndyce then withdrawing into the temporary growlery, Miss Jellyby opened a conversation with her usual abruptness.

"We are going on just as bad as ever in Thavies Inn," said she. "I have no peace of my life. Talk of Africa! I couldn't be worse off if I was a what's-his-name—man and a brother!"

I tried to say something soothing.

"Oh, it's of no use, Miss Summerson," exclaimed Miss Jellyby, "though

I thank you for the kind intention all the same. I know how I am used, and I am not to be talked over. YOU wouldn't be talked over if you were used so. Peepy, go and play at Wild Beasts under the piano!"

"I shan't!" said Peepy.

"Very well, you ungrateful, naughty, hard-hearted boy!" returned Miss Jellyby with tears in her eyes. "I'll never take pains to dress you any more."

"Yes, I will go, Caddy!" cried Peepy, who was really a good child and who was so moved by his sister's vexation that he went at once.

"It seems a little thing to cry about," said poor Miss Jellyby apologetically, "but I am quite worn out. I was directing the new circulars till two this morning. I detest the whole thing so that that alone makes my head ache till I can't see out of my eyes. And look at that poor unfortunate child! Was there ever such a fright as he is!"

Peepy, happily unconscious of the defects in his appearance, sat on the carpet behind one of the legs of the piano, looking calmly out of his den at us while he ate his cake.

"I have sent him to the other end of the room," observed Miss Jellyby, drawing her chair nearer ours, "because I don't want him to hear the conversation. Those little things are so sharp! I was going to say, we really are going on worse than ever. Pa will be a bankrupt before long, and then I hope Ma will be satisfied. There'll he nobody but Ma to thank for it."

We said we hoped Mr. Jellyby's affairs were not in so bad a state as that.

"It's of no use hoping, though it's very kind of you," returned Miss Jellyby, shaking her head. "Pa told me only yesterday morning (and dreadfully unhappy he is) that he couldn't weather the storm. I should be surprised if he could. When all our tradesmen send into our house any stuff they like, and the servants do what they like with it, and I have no time to improve things if I knew how, and Ma don't care about anything, I should like to make out how Pa is to weather the storm. I declare if I was Pa, I'd run away."

"My dear!" said I, smiling. "Your papa, no doubt, considers his family."

"Oh, yes, his family is all very fine, Miss Summerson," replied Miss Jellyby; "but what comfort is his family to him? His family is nothing but bills, dirt, waste, noise, tumbles downstairs, confusion, and wretchedness. His scrambling home, from week's end to week's end, is like one great washing-day—only nothing's washed!"

Miss Jellyby tapped her foot upon the floor and wiped her eyes.

"I am sure I pity Pa to that degree," she said, "and am so angry with Ma that I can't find words to express myself! However, I am not going to bear it, I am determined. I won't be a slave all my life, and I won't submit to be proposed to by Mr. Quale. A pretty thing, indeed, to marry a philanthropist. As if I hadn't had enough of THAT!" said poor Miss Jellyby.

I must confess that I could not help feeling rather angry with Mrs. Jellyby myself, seeing and hearing this neglected girl and knowing how much of bitterly satirical truth there was in what she said.

"If it wasn't that we had been intimate when you stopped at our house," pursued Miss Jellyby, "I should have been ashamed to come here to-day, for I know what a figure I must seem to you two. But as it is, I made up my mind to call, especially as I am not likely to see you again the next time you come to town."

She said this with such great significance that Ada and I glanced at one another, foreseeing something more.

"No!" said Miss Jellyby, shaking her head. "Not at all likely! I know I may trust you two. I am sure you won't betray me. I am engaged."

"Without their knowledge at home?" said I.

"Why, good gracious me, Miss Summerson," she returned, justifying herself in a fretful but not angry manner, "how can it be otherwise? You know what Ma is—and I needn't make poor Pa more miserable by telling HIM."

"But would it not be adding to his unhappiness to marry without his knowledge or consent, my dear?" said I.

"No," said Miss Jellyby, softening. "I hope not. I should try to make him happy and comfortable when he came to see me, and Peepy and the others should take it in turns to come and stay with me, and they should have some care taken of them then."

There was a good deal of affection in poor Caddy. She softened more and more while saying this and cried so much over the unwonted little home-picture she had raised in her mind that Peepy, in his cave under the piano, was touched, and turned himself over on his back with loud lamentations. It was not until I had brought him to kiss his sister, and had restored him to his place on my lap, and had shown him that Caddy was laughing (she laughed expressly for the purpose), that we could recall his

peace of mind; even then it was for some time conditional on his taking us in turns by the chin and smoothing our faces all over with his hand. At last, as his spirits were not equal to the piano, we put him on a chair to look out of window; and Miss Jellyby, holding him by one leg, resumed her confidence.

"It began in your coming to our house," she said.

We naturally asked how.

"I felt I was so awkward," she replied, "that I made up my mind to be improved in that respect at all events and to learn to dance. I told Ma I was ashamed of myself, and I must be taught to dance. Ma looked at me in that provoking way of hers as if I wasn't in sight, but I was quite determined to be taught to dance, and so I went to Mr. Turveydrop's Academy in Newman Street."

"And was it there, my dear—" I began.

"Yes, it was there," said Caddy, "and I am engaged to Mr. Turveydrop. There are two Mr. Turveydrops, father and son. My Mr. Turveydrop is the son, of course. I only wish I had been better brought up and was likely to make him a better wife, for I am very fond of him."

"I am sorry to hear this," said I, "I must confess."

"I don't know why you should be sorry," she retorted a little anxiously, "but I am engaged to Mr. Turveydrop, whether or no, and he is very fond of me. It's a secret as yet, even on his side, because old Mr. Turveydrop has a share in the connexion and it might break his heart or give him some other shock if he was told of it abruptly. Old Mr. Turveydrop is a very gentlemanly man indeed—very gentlemanly."

"Does his wife know of it?" asked Ada.

"Old Mr. Turveydrop's wife, Miss Clare?" returned Miss Jellyby, opening her eyes. "There's no such person. He is a widower."

We were here interrupted by Peepy, whose leg had undergone so much on account of his sister's unconsciously jerking it like a bell-rope whenever she was emphatic that the afflicted child now bemoaned his sufferings with a very low-spirited noise. As he appealed to me for compassion, and as I was only a listener, I undertook to hold him. Miss Jellyby proceeded, after begging Peepy's pardon with a kiss and assuring him that she hadn't meant to do it.

"That's the state of the case," said Caddy. "If I ever blame myself, I still

think it's Ma's fault. We are to be married whenever we can, and then I shall go to Pa at the office and write to Ma. It won't much agitate Ma; I am only pen and ink to HER. One great comfort is," said Caddy with a sob, "that I shall never hear of Africa after I am married. Young Mr. Turveydrop hates it for my sake, and if old Mr. Turveydrop knows there is such a place, it's as much as he does."

"It was he who was very gentlemanly, I think!" said I.

"Very gentlemanly indeed," said Caddy. "He is celebrated almost everywhere for his deportment."

"Does he teach?" asked Ada.

"No, he don't teach anything in particular," replied Caddy. "But his deportment is beautiful."

Caddy went on to say with considerable hesitation and reluctance that there was one thing more she wished us to know, and felt we ought to know, and which she hoped would not offend us. It was that she had improved her acquaintance with Miss Flite, the little crazy old lady, and that she frequently went there early in the morning and met her lover for a few minutes before breakfast—only for a few minutes. "I go there at other times," said Caddy, "but Prince does not come then. Young Mr. Turveydrop's name is Prince; I wish it wasn't, because it sounds like a dog, but of course he didn't christen himself. Old Mr. Turveydrop had him christened Prince in remembrance of the Prince Regent. Old Mr. Turveydrop adored the Prince Regent on account of his deportment. I hope you won't think the worse of me for having made these little appointments at Miss Flite's, where I first went with you, because I like the poor thing for her own sake and I believe she likes me. If you could see young Mr. Turveydrop, I am sure you would think well of him—at least, I am sure you couldn't possibly think any ill of him. I am going there now for my lesson. I couldn't ask you to go with me, Miss Summerson; but if you would," said Caddy, who had said all this earnestly and tremblingly, "I should be very glad—very glad."

It happened that we had arranged with my guardian to go to Miss Flite's that day. We had told him of our former visit, and our account had interested him; but something had always happened to prevent our going there again. As I trusted that I might have sufficient influence with Miss Jellyby to prevent her taking any very rash step if I fully accepted the

confidence she was so willing to place in me, poor girl, I proposed that she and I and Peepy should go to the academy and afterwards meet my guardian and Ada at Miss Flite's, whose name I now learnt for the first time. This was on condition that Miss Jellyby and Peepy should come back with us to dinner. The last article of the agreement being joyfully acceded to by both, we smartened Peepy up a little with the assistance of a few pins, some soap and water, and a hair-brush, and went out, bending our steps towards Newman Street, which was very near.

I found the academy established in a sufficiently dingy house at the corner of an archway, with busts in all the staircase windows. In the same house there were also established, as I gathered from the plates on the door, a drawing-master, a coal-merchant (there was, certainly, no room for his coals), and a lithographic artist. On the plate which, in size and situation, took precedence of all the rest, I read, MR. TURVEYDROP. The door was open, and the hall was blocked up by a grand piano, a harp, and several other musical instruments in cases, all in progress of removal, and all looking rakish in the daylight. Miss Jellyby informed me that the academy had been lent, last night, for a concert.

We went upstairs—it had been quite a fine house once, when it was anybody's business to keep it clean and fresh, and nobody's business to smoke in it all day—and into Mr. Turveydrop's great room, which was built out into a mews at the back and was lighted by a skylight. It was a bare, resounding room smelling of stables, with cane forms along the walls, and the walls ornamented at regular intervals with painted lyres and little cut-glass branches for candles, which seemed to be shedding their old-fashioned drops as other branches might shed autumn leaves. Several young lady pupils, ranging from thirteen or fourteen years of age to two or three and twenty, were assembled; and I was looking among them for their instructor when Caddy, pinching my arm, repeated the ceremony of introduction. "Miss Summerson, Mr. Prince Turveydrop!"

I curtsied to a little blue-eyed fair man of youthful appearance with flaxen hair parted in the middle and curling at the ends all round his head. He had a little fiddle, which we used to call at school a kit, under his left arm, and its little bow in the same hand. His little dancing-shoes were particularly diminutive, and he had a little innocent, feminine manner which not only appealed to me in an amiable way, but made this singular effect

upon me, that I received the impression that he was like his mother and that his mother had not been much considered or well used.

"I am very happy to see Miss Jellyby's friend," he said, bowing low to me. "I began to fear," with timid tenderness, "as it was past the usual time, that Miss Jellyby was not coming."

"I beg you will have the goodness to attribute that to me, who have detained her, and to receive my excuses, sir," said I.

"Oh, dear!" said he.

"And pray," I entreated, "do not allow me to be the cause of any more delay."

With that apology I withdrew to a seat between Peepy (who, being well used to it, had already climbed into a corner place) and an old lady of a censorious countenance whose two nieces were in the class and who was very indignant with Peepy's boots. Prince Turveydrop then tinkled the strings of his kit with his fingers, and the young ladies stood up to dance. Just then there appeared from a side-door old Mr. Turveydrop, in the full lustre of his deportment.

He was a fat old gentleman with a false complexion, false teeth, false whiskers, and a wig. He had a fur collar, and he had a padded breast to his coat, which only wanted a star or a broad blue ribbon to be complete. He was pinched in, and swelled out, and got up, and strapped down, as much as he could possibly bear. He had such a neckcloth on (puffing his very eyes out of their natural shape), and his chin and even his ears so sunk into it, that it seemed as though he must inevitably double up if it were cast loose. He had under his arm a hat of great size and weight, shelving downward from the crown to the brim, and in his hand a pair of white gloves with which he flapped it as he stood poised on one leg in a high-shouldered, round-elbowed state of elegance not to be surpassed. He had a cane, he had an eye-glass, he had a snuff-box, he had rings, he had wristbands, he had everything but any touch of nature; he was not like youth, he was not like age, he was not like anything in the world but a model of deportment.

"Father! A visitor. Miss Jellyby's friend, Miss Summerson."

"Distinguished," said Mr. Turveydrop, "by Miss Summerson's presence." As he bowed to me in that tight state, I almost believe I saw creases come into the whites of his eyes.

"My father," said the son, aside, to me with quite an affecting belief in

him, “is a celebrated character. My father is greatly admired.”

“Go on, Prince! Go on!” said Mr. Turveydrop, standing with his back to the fire and waving his gloves condescendingly. “Go on, my son!”

At this command, or by this gracious permission, the lesson went on. Prince Turveydrop sometimes played the kit, dancing; sometimes played the piano, standing; sometimes hummed the tune with what little breath he could spare, while he set a pupil right; always conscientiously moved with the least proficient through every step and every part of the figure; and never rested for an instant. His distinguished father did nothing whatever but stand before the fire, a model of deportment.

“And he never does anything else,” said the old lady of the censorious countenance. “Yet would you believe that it’s HIS name on the door-plate?”

“His son’s name is the same, you know,” said I.

“He wouldn’t let his son have any name if he could take it from him,” returned the old lady. “Look at the son’s dress!” It certainly was plain—threadbare—almost shabby. “Yet the father must be garnished and tricked out,” said the old lady, “because of his deportment. I’d deport him! Transport him would be better!”

I felt curious to know more concerning this person. I asked, “Does he give lessons in deportment now?”

“Now!” returned the old lady shortly. “Never did.”

After a moment’s consideration, I suggested that perhaps fencing had been his accomplishment.

“I don’t believe he can fence at all, ma’am,” said the old lady.

I looked surprised and inquisitive. The old lady, becoming more and more incensed against the master of deportment as she dwelt upon the subject, gave me some particulars of his career, with strong assurances that they were mildly stated.

He had married a meek little dancing-mistress, with a tolerable connexion (having never in his life before done anything but deport himself), and had worked her to death, or had, at the best, suffered her to work herself to death, to maintain him in those expenses which were indispensable to his position. At once to exhibit his deportment to the best models and to keep the best models constantly before himself, he had found it necessary to frequent all public places of fashionable and lounging resort, to be seen at Brighton and elsewhere at fashionable times, and to lead an

idle life in the very best clothes. To enable him to do this, the affectionate little dancing-mistress had toiled and laboured and would have toiled and laboured to that hour if her strength had lasted so long. For the mainspring of the story was that in spite of the man's absorbing selfishness, his wife (overpowered by his deportment) had, to the last, believed in him and had, on her death-bed, in the most moving terms, confided him to their son as one who had an inextinguishable claim upon him and whom he could never regard with too much pride and deference. The son, inheriting his mother's belief, and having the deportment always before him, had lived and grown in the same faith, and now, at thirty years of age, worked for his father twelve hours a day and looked up to him with veneration on the old imaginary pinnacle.

"The airs the fellow gives himself!" said my informant, shaking her head at old Mr. Turveydrop with speechless indignation as he drew on his tight gloves, of course unconscious of the homage she was rendering. "He fully believes he is one of the aristocracy! And he is so condescending to the son he so egregiously deludes that you might suppose him the most virtuous of parents. Oh!" said the old lady, apostrophizing him with infinite vehemence. "I could bite you!"

I could not help being amused, though I heard the old lady out with feelings of real concern. It was difficult to doubt her with the father and son before me. What I might have thought of them without the old lady's account, or what I might have thought of the old lady's account without them, I cannot say. There was a fitness of things in the whole that carried conviction with it.

My eyes were yet wandering, from young Mr. Turveydrop working so hard, to old Mr. Turveydrop deporting himself so beautifully, when the latter came ambling up to me and entered into conversation.

He asked me, first of all, whether I conferred a charm and a distinction on London by residing in it? I did not think it necessary to reply that I was perfectly aware I should not do that, in any case, but merely told him where I did reside.

"A lady so graceful and accomplished," he said, kissing his right glove and afterwards extending it towards the pupils, "will look leniently on the deficiencies here. We do our best to polish—polish—polish!"

He sat down beside me, taking some pains to sit on the form, I thought,

in imitation of the print of his illustrious model on the sofa. And really he did look very like it.

"To polish—polish—polish!" he repeated, taking a pinch of snuff and gently fluttering his fingers. "But we are not, if I may say so to one formed to be graceful both by Nature and Art—" with the high-shouldered bow, which it seemed impossible for him to make without lifting up his eyebrows and shutting his eyes "—we are not what we used to be in point of deportment."

"Are we not, sir?" said I.

"We have degenerated," he returned, shaking his head, which he could do to a very limited extent in his cravat. "A levelling age is not favourable to deportment. It develops vulgarity. Perhaps I speak with some little partiality. It may not be for me to say that I have been called, for some years now, Gentleman Turveydrop, or that his Royal Highness the Prince Regent did me the honour to inquire, on my removing my hat as he drove out of the Pavilion at Brighton (that fine building), 'Who is he? Who the devil is he? Why don't I know him? Why hasn't he thirty thousand a year?' But these are little matters of anecdote—the general property, ma'am—still repeated occasionally among the upper classes."

"Indeed?" said I.

He replied with the high-shouldered bow. "Where what is left among us of deportment," he added, "still lingers. England—alas, my country!—has degenerated very much, and is degenerating every day. She has not many gentlemen left. We are few. I see nothing to succeed us but a race of weavers."

"One might hope that the race of gentlemen would be perpetuated here," said I.

"You are very good." He smiled with a high-shouldered bow again. "You flatter me. But, no—no! I have never been able to imbue my poor boy with that part of his art. Heaven forbid that I should disparage my dear child, but he has—no deportment."

"He appears to be an excellent master," I observed.

"Understand me, my dear madam, he IS an excellent master. All that can be acquired, he has acquired. All that can be imparted, he can impart. But there ARE things—" He took another pinch of snuff and made the bow again, as if to add, "This kind of thing, for instance."

I glanced towards the centre of the room, where Miss Jellyby's lover, now engaged with single pupils, was undergoing greater drudgery than ever.

"My amiable child," murmured Mr. Turveydrop, adjusting his cravat.

"Your son is indefatigable," said I.

"It is my reward," said Mr. Turveydrop, "to hear you say so. In some respects, he treads in the footsteps of his sainted mother. She was a devoted creature. But wooman, lovely wooman," said Mr. Turveydrop with very disagreeable gallantry, "what a sex you are!"

I rose and joined Miss Jellyby, who was by this time putting on her bonnet. The time allotted to a lesson having fully elapsed, there was a general putting on of bonnets. When Miss Jellyby and the unfortunate Prince found an opportunity to become betrothed I don't know, but they certainly found none on this occasion to exchange a dozen words.

"My dear," said Mr. Turveydrop benignly to his son, "do you know the hour?"

"No, father." The son had no watch. The father had a handsome gold one, which he pulled out with an air that was an example to mankind.

"My son," said he, "it's two o'clock. Recollect your school at Kensington at three."

"That's time enough for me, father," said Prince. "I can take a morsel of dinner standing and be off."

"My dear boy," returned his father, "you must be very quick. You will find the cold mutton on the table."

"Thank you, father. Are YOU off now, father?"

"Yes, my dear. I suppose," said Mr. Turveydrop, shutting his eyes and lifting up his shoulders with modest consciousness, "that I must show myself, as usual, about town."

"You had better dine out comfortably somewhere," said his son.

"My dear child, I intend to. I shall take my little meal, I think, at the French house, in the Opera Colonnade."

"That's right. Good-bye, father!" said Prince, shaking hands.

"Good-bye, my son. Bless you!"

Mr. Turveydrop said this in quite a pious manner, and it seemed to do his son good, who, in parting from him, was so pleased with him, so dutiful to him, and so proud of him that I almost felt as if it were an unkindness to the younger man not to be able to believe implicitly in the elder. The few

moments that were occupied by Prince in taking leave of us (and particularly of one of us, as I saw, being in the secret), enhanced my favourable impression of his almost childish character. I felt a liking for him and a compassion for him as he put his little kit in his pocket—and with it his desire to stay a little while with Caddy—and went away good-humouredly to his cold mutton and his school at Kensington, that made me scarcely less irate with his father than the censorious old lady.

The father opened the room door for us and bowed us out in a manner, I must acknowledge, worthy of his shining original. In the same style he presently passed us on the other side of the street, on his way to the aristocratic part of the town, where he was going to show himself among the few other gentlemen left. For some moments, I was so lost in reconsidering what I had heard and seen in Newman Street that I was quite unable to talk to Caddy or even to fix my attention on what she said to me, especially when I began to inquire in my mind whether there were, or ever had been, any other gentlemen, not in the dancing profession, who lived and founded a reputation entirely on their deportment. This became so bewildering and suggested the possibility of so many Mr. Turveydrops that I said, “Esther, you must make up your mind to abandon this subject altogether and attend to Caddy.” I accordingly did so, and we chatted all the rest of the way to Lincoln’s Inn.

Caddy told me that her lover’s education had been so neglected that it was not always easy to read his notes. She said if he were not so anxious about his spelling and took less pains to make it clear, he would do better; but he put so many unnecessary letters into short words that they sometimes quite lost their English appearance. “He does it with the best intention,” observed Caddy, “but it hasn’t the effect he means, poor fellow!” Caddy then went on to reason, how could he be expected to be a scholar when he had passed his whole life in the dancing-school and had done nothing but teach and fag, fag and teach, morning, noon, and night! And what did it matter? She could write letters enough for both, as she knew to her cost, and it was far better for him to be amiable than learned. “Besides, it’s not as if I was an accomplished girl who had any right to give herself airs,” said Caddy. “I know little enough, I am sure, thanks to Ma!

“There’s another thing I want to tell you, now we are alone,” continued Caddy, “which I should not have liked to mention unless you had seen

Prince, Miss Summerson. You know what a house ours is. It's of no use my trying to learn anything that it would be useful for Prince's wife to know in OUR house. We live in such a state of muddle that it's impossible, and I have only been more disheartened whenever I have tried. So I get a little practice with—who do you think? Poor Miss Flite! Early in the morning I help her to tidy her room and clean her birds, and I make her cup of coffee for her (of course she taught me), and I have learnt to make it so well that Prince says it's the very best coffee he ever tasted, and would quite delight old Mr. Turveydrop, who is very particular indeed about his coffee. I can make little puddings too; and I know how to buy neck of mutton, and tea, and sugar, and butter, and a good many housekeeping things. I am not clever at my needle, yet," said Caddy, glancing at the repairs on Peepy's frock, "but perhaps I shall improve, and since I have been engaged to Prince and have been doing all this, I have felt better-tempered, I hope, and more forgiving to Ma. It rather put me out at first this morning to see you and Miss Clare looking so neat and pretty and to feel ashamed of Peepy and myself too, but on the whole I hope I am better-tempered than I was and more forgiving to Ma."

The poor girl, trying so hard, said it from her heart, and touched mine. "Caddy, my love," I replied, "I begin to have a great affection for you, and I hope we shall become friends."

"Oh, do you?" cried Caddy. "How happy that would make me!"

"My dear Caddy," said I, "let us be friends from this time, and let us often have a chat about these matters and try to find the right way through them." Caddy was overjoyed. I said everything I could in my old-fashioned way to comfort and encourage her, and I would not have objected to old Mr. Turveydrop that day for any smaller consideration than a settlement on his daughter-in-law.

By this time we were come to Mr. Krook's, whose private door stood open. There was a bill, pasted on the door-post, announcing a room to let on the second floor. It reminded Caddy to tell me as we proceeded upstairs that there had been a sudden death there and an inquest and that our little friend had been ill of the fright. The door and window of the vacant room being open, we looked in. It was the room with the dark door to which Miss Flite had secretly directed my attention when I was last in the house. A sad and desolate place it was, a gloomy, sorrowful place that gave me a strange

sensation of mournfulness and even dread. “You look pale,” said Caddy when we came out, “and cold!” I felt as if the room had chilled me.

We had walked slowly while we were talking, and my guardian and Ada were here before us. We found them in Miss Flite’s garret. They were looking at the birds, while a medical gentleman who was so good as to attend Miss Flite with much solicitude and compassion spoke with her cheerfully by the fire.

“I have finished my professional visit,” he said, coming forward. “Miss Flite is much better and may appear in court (as her mind is set upon it) to-morrow. She has been greatly missed there, I understand.”

Miss Flite received the compliment with complacency and dropped a general curtsy to us.

“Honoured, indeed,” said she, “by another visit from the wards in Jarndyce! Ve-ry happy to receive Jarndyce of Bleak House beneath my humble roof!” with a special curtsy. “Fitz-Jarndyce, my dear”—she had bestowed that name on Caddy, it appeared, and always called her by it—“a double welcome!”

“Has she been very ill?” asked Mr. Jarndyce of the gentleman whom we had found in attendance on her. She answered for herself directly, though he had put the question in a whisper.

“Oh, decidedly unwell! Oh, very unwell indeed,” she said confidentially. “Not pain, you know—trouble. Not bodily so much as nervous, nervous! The truth is,” in a subdued voice and trembling, “we have had death here. There was poison in the house. I am very susceptible to such horrid things. It frightened me. Only Mr. Woodcourt knows how much. My physician, Mr. Woodcourt!” with great stateliness. “The wards in Jarndyce—Jarndyce of Bleak House—Fitz-Jarndyce!”

“Miss Flite,” said Mr. Woodcourt in a grave kind of voice, as if he were appealing to her while speaking to us, and laying his hand gently on her arm, “Miss Flite describes her illness with her usual accuracy. She was alarmed by an occurrence in the house which might have alarmed a stronger person, and was made ill by the distress and agitation. She brought me here in the first hurry of the discovery, though too late for me to be of any use to the unfortunate man. I have compensated myself for that disappointment by coming here since and being of some small use to her.”

“The kindest physician in the college,” whispered Miss Flite to me. “I

expect a judgment. On the day of judgment. And shall then confer estates."

"She will be as well in a day or two," said Mr. Woodcourt, looking at her with an observant smile, "as she ever will be. In other words, quite well of course. Have you heard of her good fortune?"

"Most extraordinary!" said Miss Flite, smiling brightly. "You never heard of such a thing, my dear! Every Saturday, Conversation Kenge or Guppy (clerk to Conversation K.) places in my hand a paper of shillings. Shillings. I assure you! Always the same number in the paper. Always one for every day in the week. Now you know, really! So well-timed, is it not? Ye-es! From whence do these papers come, you say? That is the great question. Naturally. Shall I tell you what I think? I think," said Miss Flite, drawing herself back with a very shrewd look and shaking her right forefinger in a most significant manner, "that the Lord Chancellor, aware of the length of time during which the Great Seal has been open (for it has been open a long time!), forwards them. Until the judgment I expect is given. Now that's very creditable, you know. To confess in that way that he IS a little slow for human life. So delicate! Attending court the other day—I attend it regularly, with my documents—I taxed him with it, and he almost confessed. That is, I smiled at him from my bench, and HE smiled at me from his bench. But it's great good fortune, is it not? And Fitz-Jarndyce lays the money out for me to great advantage. Oh, I assure you to the greatest advantage!"

I congratulated her (as she addressed herself to me) upon this fortunate addition to her income and wished her a long continuance of it. I did not speculate upon the source from which it came or wonder whose humanity was so considerate. My guardian stood before me, contemplating the birds, and I had no need to look beyond him.

"And what do you call these little fellows, ma'am?" said he in his pleasant voice. "Have they any names?"

"I can answer for Miss Flite that they have," said I, "for she promised to tell us what they were. Ada remembers?"

Ada remembered very well.

"Did I?" said Miss Flite. "Who's that at my door? What are you listening at my door for, Krook?"

The old man of the house, pushing it open before him, appeared there with his fur cap in his hand and his cat at his heels.

“I warn’t listening, Miss Flite,” he said, “I was going to give a rap with my knuckles, only you’re so quick!”

“Make your cat go down. Drive her away!” the old lady angrily exclaimed.

“Bah, bah! There ain’t no danger, gentlefolks,” said Mr. Krook, looking slowly and sharply from one to another until he had looked at all of us; “she’d never offer at the birds when I was here unless I told her to it.”

“You will excuse my landlord,” said the old lady with a dignified air. “M, quite M! What do you want, Krook, when I have company?”

“Hi!” said the old man. “You know I am the Chancellor.”

“Well?” returned Miss Flite. “What of that?”

“For the Chancellor,” said the old man with a chuckle, “not to be acquainted with a Jarndyce is queer, ain’t it, Miss Flite? Mightn’t I take the liberty? Your servant, sir. I know Jarndyce and Jarndyce a’most as well as you do, sir. I knowed old Squire Tom, sir. I never to my knowledge see you afore though, not even in court. Yet, I go there a mortal sight of times in the course of the year, taking one day with another.”

“I never go there,” said Mr. Jarndyce (which he never did on any consideration). “I would sooner go—somewhere else.”

“Would you though?” returned Krook, grinning. “You’re bearing hard upon my noble and learned brother in your meaning, sir, though perhaps it is but nat’ral in a Jarndyce. The burnt child, sir! What, you’re looking at my lodger’s birds, Mr. Jarndyce?” The old man had come by little and little into the room until he now touched my guardian with his elbow and looked close up into his face with his spectacled eyes. “It’s one of her strange ways that she’ll never tell the names of these birds if she can help it, though she named ’em all.” This was in a whisper. “Shall I run ’em over, Flite?” he asked aloud, winking at us and pointing at her as she turned away, affecting to sweep the grate.

“If you like,” she answered hurriedly.

The old man, looking up at the cages after another look at us, went through the list.

“Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach. That’s the whole collection,” said the old man, “all cooped up together, by my noble and

learned brother.”

“This is a bitter wind!” muttered my guardian.

“When my noble and learned brother gives his judgment, they’re to be let go free,” said Krook, winking at us again. “And then,” he added, whispering and grinning, “if that ever was to happen—which it won’t—the birds that have never been caged would kill ’em.”

“If ever the wind was in the east,” said my guardian, pretending to look out of the window for a weathercock, “I think it’s there to-day!”

We found it very difficult to get away from the house. It was not Miss Flite who detained us; she was as reasonable a little creature in consulting the convenience of others as there possibly could be. It was Mr. Krook. He seemed unable to detach himself from Mr. Jarndyce. If he had been linked to him, he could hardly have attended him more closely. He proposed to show us his Court of Chancery and all the strange medley it contained; during the whole of our inspection (prolonged by himself) he kept close to Mr. Jarndyce and sometimes detained him under one pretence or other until we had passed on, as if he were tormented by an inclination to enter upon some secret subject which he could not make up his mind to approach. I cannot imagine a countenance and manner more singularly expressive of caution and indecision, and a perpetual impulse to do something he could not resolve to venture on, than Mr. Krook’s was that day. His watchfulness of my guardian was incessant. He rarely removed his eyes from his face. If he went on beside him, he observed him with the slyness of an old white fox. If he went before, he looked back. When we stood still, he got opposite to him, and drawing his hand across and across his open mouth with a curious expression of a sense of power, and turning up his eyes, and lowering his grey eyebrows until they appeared to be shut, seemed to scan every lineament of his face.

At last, having been (always attended by the cat) all over the house and having seen the whole stock of miscellaneous lumber, which was certainly curious, we came into the back part of the shop. Here on the head of an empty barrel stood on end were an ink-bottle, some old stumps of pens, and some dirty playbills; and against the wall were pasted several large printed alphabets in several plain hands.

“What are you doing here?” asked my guardian.

“Trying to learn myself to read and write,” said Krook.

“And how do you get on?”

“Slow. Bad,” returned the old man impatiently. “It’s hard at my time of life.”

“It would be easier to be taught by some one,” said my guardian.

“Aye, but they might teach me wrong!” returned the old man with a wonderfully suspicious flash of his eye. “I don’t know what I may have lost by not being learned afore. I wouldn’t like to lose anything by being learned wrong now.”

“Wrong?” said my guardian with his good-humoured smile. “Who do you suppose would teach you wrong?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House!” replied the old man, turning up his spectacles on his forehead and rubbing his hands. “I don’t suppose as anybody would, but I’d rather trust my own self than another!”

These answers and his manner were strange enough to cause my guardian to inquire of Mr. Woodcourt, as we all walked across Lincoln’s Inn together, whether Mr. Krook were really, as his lodger represented him, deranged. The young surgeon replied, no, he had seen no reason to think so. He was exceedingly distrustful, as ignorance usually was, and he was always more or less under the influence of raw gin, of which he drank great quantities and of which he and his back-shop, as we might have observed, smelt strongly; but he did not think him mad as yet.

On our way home, I so conciliated Peepy’s affections by buying him a windmill and two flour-sacks that he would suffer nobody else to take off his hat and gloves and would sit nowhere at dinner but at my side. Caddy sat upon the other side of me, next to Ada, to whom we imparted the whole history of the engagement as soon as we got back. We made much of Caddy, and Peepy too; and Caddy brightened exceedingly; and my guardian was as merry as we were; and we were all very happy indeed until Caddy went home at night in a hackney-coach, with Peepy fast asleep, but holding tight to the windmill.

I have forgotten to mention—at least I have not mentioned—that Mr. Woodcourt was the same dark young surgeon whom we had met at Mr. Badger’s. Or that Mr. Jarndyce invited him to dinner that day. Or that he came. Or that when they were all gone and I said to Ada, “Now, my darling, let us have a little talk about Richard!” Ada laughed and said—

But I don’t think it matters what my darling said. She was always merry.

CHAPTER XV

Bell Yard

WHILE WE WERE IN London Mr. Jarndyce was constantly beset by the crowd of excitable ladies and gentlemen whose proceedings had so much astonished us. Mr. Quale, who presented himself soon after our arrival, was in all such excitements. He seemed to project those two shining knobs of temples of his into everything that went on and to brush his hair farther and farther back, until the very roots were almost ready to fly out of his head in inappeasable philanthropy. All objects were alike to him, but he was always particularly ready for anything in the way of a testimonial to any one. His great power seemed to be his power of indiscriminate admiration. He would sit for any length of time, with the utmost enjoyment, bathing his temples in the light of any order of luminary. Having first seen him perfectly swallowed up in admiration of Mrs. Jellyby, I had supposed her to be the absorbing object of his devotion. I soon discovered my mistake and found him to be train-bearer and organ-blower to a whole procession of people.

Mrs. Pardiggle came one day for a subscription to something, and with her, Mr. Quale. Whatever Mrs. Pardiggle said, Mr. Quale repeated to us; and just as he had drawn Mrs. Jellyby out, he drew Mrs. Pardiggle out. Mrs. Pardiggle wrote a letter of introduction to my guardian in behalf of her eloquent friend Mr. Gusher. With Mr. Gusher appeared Mr. Quale again. Mr. Gusher, being a flabby gentleman with a moist surface and eyes so much too small for his moon of a face that they seemed to have been originally made for somebody else, was not at first sight prepossessing; yet he was scarcely seated before Mr. Quale asked Ada and me, not inaudibly, whether he was not a great creature—which he certainly was, flabbily speaking, though Mr. Quale meant in intellectual beauty—and whether we were not struck by his massive configuration of brow. In short, we heard of a great many missions of various sorts among this set of people, but nothing respecting them was half so clear to us as that it was Mr. Quale’s mission to be in ecstasies with everybody else’s mission and that it was the most

popular mission of all.

Mr. Jarndyce had fallen into this company in the tenderness of his heart and his earnest desire to do all the good in his power; but that he felt it to be too often an unsatisfactory company, where benevolence took spasmodic forms, where charity was assumed as a regular uniform by loud professors and speculators in cheap notoriety, vehement in profession, restless and vain in action, servile in the last degree of meanness to the great, adulatory of one another, and intolerable to those who were anxious quietly to help the weak from failing rather than with a great deal of bluster and self-laudation to raise them up a little way when they were down, he plainly told us. When a testimonial was originated to Mr. Quale by Mr. Gusher (who had already got one, originated by Mr. Quale), and when Mr. Gusher spoke for an hour and a half on the subject to a meeting, including two charity schools of small boys and girls, who were specially reminded of the widow's mite, and requested to come forward with halfpence and be acceptable sacrifices, I think the wind was in the east for three whole weeks.

I mention this because I am coming to Mr. Skimpole again. It seemed to me that his off-hand professions of childishness and carelessness were a great relief to my guardian, by contrast with such things, and were the more readily believed in since to find one perfectly undesigning and candid man among many opposites could not fail to give him pleasure. I should be sorry to imply that Mr. Skimpole divined this and was politic; I really never understood him well enough to know. What he was to my guardian, he certainly was to the rest of the world.

He had not been very well; and thus, though he lived in London, we had seen nothing of him until now. He appeared one morning in his usual agreeable way and as full of pleasant spirits as ever.

Well, he said, here he was! He had been bilious, but rich men were often bilious, and therefore he had been persuading himself that he was a man of property. So he was, in a certain point of view—in his expansive intentions. He had been enriching his medical attendant in the most lavish manner. He had always doubled, and sometimes quadrupled, his fees. He had said to the doctor, "Now, my dear doctor, it is quite a delusion on your part to suppose that you attend me for nothing. I am overwhelming you with money—in my expansive intentions—if you only knew it!" And really (he said) he meant it

to that degree that he thought it much the same as doing it. If he had had those bits of metal or thin paper to which mankind attached so much importance to put in the doctor's hand, he would have put them in the doctor's hand. Not having them, he substituted the will for the deed. Very well! If he really meant it—if his will were genuine and real, which it was—it appeared to him that it was the same as coin, and cancelled the obligation.

"It may be, partly, because I know nothing of the value of money," said Mr. Skimpole, "but I often feel this. It seems so reasonable! My butcher says to me he wants that little bill. It's a part of the pleasant unconscious poetry of the man's nature that he always calls it a 'little' bill—to make the payment appear easy to both of us. I reply to the butcher, 'My good friend, if you knew it, you are paid. You haven't had the trouble of coming to ask for the little bill. You are paid. I mean it.'"

"But, suppose," said my guardian, laughing, "he had meant the meat in the bill, instead of providing it?"

"My dear Jarndyce," he returned, "you surprise me. You take the butcher's position. A butcher I once dealt with occupied that very ground. Says he, 'Sir, why did you eat spring lamb at eighteen pence a pound?' 'Why did I eat spring lamb at eighteen pence a pound, my honest friend?' said I, naturally amazed by the question. 'I like spring lamb!' This was so far convincing. 'Well, sir,' says he, 'I wish I had meant the lamb as you mean the money!' 'My good fellow,' said I, 'pray let us reason like intellectual beings. How could that be? It was impossible. You HAD got the lamb, and I have NOT got the money. You couldn't really mean the lamb without sending it in, whereas I can, and do, really mean the money without paying it!' He had not a word. There was an end of the subject."

"Did he take no legal proceedings?" inquired my guardian.

"Yes, he took legal proceedings," said Mr. Skimpole. "But in that he was influenced by passion, not by reason. Passion reminds me of Boythorn. He writes me that you and the ladies have promised him a short visit at his bachelor-house in Lincolnshire."

"He is a great favourite with my girls," said Mr. Jarndyce, "and I have promised for them."

"Nature forgot to shade him off, I think," observed Mr. Skimpole to Ada and me. "A little too boisterous—like the sea. A little too vehement—like a

bull who has made up his mind to consider every colour scarlet. But I grant a sledge-hammering sort of merit in him!”

I should have been surprised if those two could have thought very highly of one another, Mr. Boythorn attaching so much importance to many things and Mr. Skimpole caring so little for anything. Besides which, I had noticed Mr. Boythorn more than once on the point of breaking out into some strong opinion when Mr. Skimpole was referred to. Of course I merely joined Ada in saying that we had been greatly pleased with him.

“He has invited me,” said Mr. Skimpole; “and if a child may trust himself in such hands—which the present child is encouraged to do, with the united tenderness of two angels to guard him—I shall go. He proposes to frank me down and back again. I suppose it will cost money? Shillings perhaps? Or pounds? Or something of that sort? By the by, Coavinses. You remember our friend Coavinses, Miss Summerson?”

He asked me as the subject arose in his mind, in his graceful, light-hearted manner and without the least embarrassment.

“Oh, yes!” said I.

“Coavinses has been arrested by the Great Bailiff,” said Mr. Skimpole. “He will never do violence to the sunshine any more.”

It quite shocked me to hear it, for I had already recalled with anything but a serious association the image of the man sitting on the sofa that night wiping his head.

“His successor informed me of it yesterday,” said Mr. Skimpole. “His successor is in my house now—in possession, I think he calls it. He came yesterday, on my blue-eyed daughter’s birthday. I put it to him, ‘This is unreasonable and inconvenient. If you had a blue-eyed daughter you wouldn’t like ME to come, uninvited, on HER birthday?’ But he stayed.”

Mr. Skimpole laughed at the pleasant absurdity and lightly touched the piano by which he was seated.

“And he told me,” he said, playing little chords where I shall put full stops, “The Coavinses had left. Three children. No mother. And that Coavinses’ profession. Being unpopular. The rising Coavinses. Were at a considerable disadvantage.”

Mr. Jarndyce got up, rubbing his head, and began to walk about. Mr. Skimpole played the melody of one of Ada’s favourite songs. Ada and I both looked at Mr. Jarndyce, thinking that we knew what was passing in his

mind.

After walking and stopping, and several times leaving off rubbing his head, and beginning again, my guardian put his hand upon the keys and stopped Mr. Skimpole's playing. "I don't like this, Skimpole," he said thoughtfully.

Mr. Skimpole, who had quite forgotten the subject, looked up surprised.

"The man was necessary," pursued my guardian, walking backward and forward in the very short space between the piano and the end of the room and rubbing his hair up from the back of his head as if a high east wind had blown it into that form. "If we make such men necessary by our faults and follies, or by our want of worldly knowledge, or by our misfortunes, we must not revenge ourselves upon them. There was no harm in his trade. He maintained his children. One would like to know more about this."

"Oh! Coavinses?" cried Mr. Skimpole, at length perceiving what he meant. "Nothing easier. A walk to Coavinses' headquarters, and you can know what you will."

Mr. Jarndyce nodded to us, who were only waiting for the signal. "Come! We will walk that way, my dears. Why not that way as soon as another!" We were quickly ready and went out. Mr. Skimpole went with us and quite enjoyed the expedition. It was so new and so refreshing, he said, for him to want Coavinses instead of Coavinses wanting him!

He took us, first, to Cursitor Street, Chancery Lane, where there was a house with barred windows, which he called Coavinses' Castle. On our going into the entry and ringing a bell, a very hideous boy came out of a sort of office and looked at us over a spiked wicket.

"Who did you want?" said the boy, fitting two of the spikes into his chin.

"There was a follower, or an officer, or something, here," said Mr. Jarndyce, "who is dead."

"Yes?" said the boy. "Well?"

"I want to know his name, if you please?"

"Name of Neckett," said the boy.

"And his address?"

"Bell Yard," said the boy. "Chandler's shop, left hand side, name of Blinder."

"Was he—I don't know how to shape the question—" murmured my guardian, "industrious?"

“Was Neckett?” said the boy. “Yes, wery much so. He was never tired of watching. He’d set upon a post at a street corner eight or ten hours at a stretch if he undertook to do it.”

“He might have done worse,” I heard my guardian soliloquize. “He might have undertaken to do it and not done it. Thank you. That’s all I want.”

We left the boy, with his head on one side and his arms on the gate, fondling and sucking the spikes, and went back to Lincoln’s Inn, where Mr. Skimpole, who had not cared to remain nearer Coavinses, awaited us. Then we all went to Bell Yard, a narrow alley at a very short distance. We soon found the chandler’s shop. In it was a good-natured-looking old woman with a dropsy, or an asthma, or perhaps both.

“Neckett’s children?” said she in reply to my inquiry. “Yes, Surely, miss. Three pair, if you please. Door right opposite the stairs.” And she handed me the key across the counter.

I glanced at the key and glanced at her, but she took it for granted that I knew what to do with it. As it could only be intended for the children’s door, I came out without asking any more questions and led the way up the dark stairs. We went as quietly as we could, but four of us made some noise on the aged boards, and when we came to the second story we found we had disturbed a man who was standing there looking out of his room.

“Is it Gridley that’s wanted?” he said, fixing his eyes on me with an angry stare.

“No, sir,” said I; “I am going higher up.”

He looked at Ada, and at Mr. Jarndyce, and at Mr. Skimpole, fixing the same angry stare on each in succession as they passed and followed me. Mr. Jarndyce gave him good day. “Good day!” he said abruptly and fiercely. He was a tall, sallow man with a careworn head on which but little hair remained, a deeply lined face, and prominent eyes. He had a combative look and a chafing, irritable manner which, associated with his figure—still large and powerful, though evidently in its decline—rather alarmed me. He had a pen in his hand, and in the glimpse I caught of his room in passing, I saw that it was covered with a litter of papers.

Leaving him standing there, we went up to the top room. I tapped at the door, and a little shrill voice inside said, “We are locked in. Mrs. Blinder’s got the key!”

I applied the key on hearing this and opened the door. In a poor room with a sloping ceiling and containing very little furniture was a mite of a boy, some five or six years old, nursing and hushing a heavy child of eighteen months. There was no fire, though the weather was cold; both children were wrapped in some poor shawls and tippets as a substitute. Their clothing was not so warm, however, but that their noses looked red and pinched and their small figures shrunken as the boy walked up and down nursing and hushing the child with its head on his shoulder.

"Who has locked you up here alone?" we naturally asked.

"Charley," said the boy, standing still to gaze at us.

"Is Charley your brother?"

"No. She's my sister, Charlotte. Father called her Charley."

"Are there any more of you besides Charley?"

"Me," said the boy, "and Emma," patting the limp bonnet of the child he was nursing. "And Charley."

"Where is Charley now?"

"Out a-washing," said the boy, beginning to walk up and down again and taking the nankeen bonnet much too near the bedstead by trying to gaze at us at the same time.

We were looking at one another and at these two children when there came into the room a very little girl, childish in figure but shrewd and older-looking in the face—pretty-faced too—wearing a womanly sort of bonnet much too large for her and drying her bare arms on a womanly sort of apron. Her fingers were white and wrinkled with washing, and the soap-suds were yet smoking which she wiped off her arms. But for this, she might have been a child playing at washing and imitating a poor working-woman with a quick observation of the truth.

She had come running from some place in the neighbourhood and had made all the haste she could. Consequently, though she was very light, she was out of breath and could not speak at first, as she stood panting, and wiping her arms, and looking quietly at us.

"Oh, here's Charley!" said the boy.

The child he was nursing stretched forth its arms and cried out to be taken by Charley. The little girl took it, in a womanly sort of manner belonging to the apron and the bonnet, and stood looking at us over the burden that clung to her most affectionately.

“Is it possible,” whispered my guardian as we put a chair for the little creature and got her to sit down with her load, the boy keeping close to her, holding to her apron, “that this child works for the rest? Look at this! For God’s sake, look at this!”

It was a thing to look at. The three children close together, and two of them relying solely on the third, and the third so young and yet with an air of age and steadiness that sat so strangely on the childish figure.

“Charley, Charley!” said my guardian. “How old are you?”

“Over thirteen, sir,” replied the child.

“Oh! What a great age,” said my guardian. “What a great age, Charley!”

I cannot describe the tenderness with which he spoke to her, half playfully yet all the more compassionately and mournfully.

“And do you live alone here with these babies, Charley?” said my guardian.

“Yes, sir,” returned the child, looking up into his face with perfect confidence, “since father died.”

“And how do you live, Charley? Oh! Charley,” said my guardian, turning his face away for a moment, “how do you live?”

“Since father died, sir, I’ve gone out to work. I’m out washing to-day.”

“God help you, Charley!” said my guardian. “You’re not tall enough to reach the tub!”

“In pattens I am, sir,” she said quickly. “I’ve got a high pair as belonged to mother.”

“And when did mother die? Poor mother!”

“Mother died just after Emma was born,” said the child, glancing at the face upon her bosom. “Then father said I was to be as good a mother to her as I could. And so I tried. And so I worked at home and did cleaning and nursing and washing for a long time before I began to go out. And that’s how I know how; don’t you see, sir?”

“And do you often go out?”

“As often as I can,” said Charley, opening her eyes and smiling, “because of earning sixpences and shillings!”

“And do you always lock the babies up when you go out?”

“To keep ’em safe, sir, don’t you see?” said Charley. “Mrs. Blinder comes up now and then, and Mr. Gridley comes up sometimes, and perhaps I can run in sometimes, and they can play you know, and Tom an’t afraid of

being locked up, are you, Tom?”

“No-o!” said Tom stoutly.

“When it comes on dark, the lamps are lighted down in the court, and they show up here quite bright—almost quite bright. Don’t they, Tom?”

“Yes, Charley,” said Tom, “almost quite bright.”

“Then he’s as good as gold,” said the little creature—Oh, in such a motherly, womanly way! “And when Emma’s tired, he puts her to bed. And when he’s tired he goes to bed himself. And when I come home and light the candle and has a bit of supper, he sits up again and has it with me. Don’t you, Tom?”

“Oh, yes, Charley!” said Tom. “That I do!” And either in this glimpse of the great pleasure of his life or in gratitude and love for Charley, who was all in all to him, he laid his face among the scanty folds of her frock and passed from laughing into crying.

It was the first time since our entry that a tear had been shed among these children. The little orphan girl had spoken of their father and their mother as if all that sorrow were subdued by the necessity of taking courage, and by her childish importance in being able to work, and by her bustling busy way. But now, when Tom cried, although she sat quite tranquil, looking quietly at us, and did not by any movement disturb a hair of the head of either of her little charges, I saw two silent tears fall down her face.

I stood at the window with Ada, pretending to look at the housetops, and the blackened stack of chimneys, and the poor plants, and the birds in little cages belonging to the neighbours, when I found that Mrs. Blinder, from the shop below, had come in (perhaps it had taken her all this time to get upstairs) and was talking to my guardian.

“It’s not much to forgive ’em the rent, sir,” she said; “who could take it from them!”

“Well, well!” said my guardian to us two. “It is enough that the time will come when this good woman will find that it WAS much, and that forasmuch as she did it unto the least of these—This child,” he added after a few moments, “could she possibly continue this?”

“Really, sir, I think she might,” said Mrs. Blinder, getting her heavy breath by painful degrees. “She’s as handy as it’s possible to be. Bless you, sir, the way she tended them two children after the mother died was the talk

of the yard! And it was a wonder to see her with him after he was took ill, it really was! ‘Mrs. Blinder,’ he said to me the very last he spoke—he was lying there—‘Mrs. Blinder, whatever my calling may have been, I see a angel sitting in this room last night along with my child, and I trust her to Our Father!’”

“He had no other calling?” said my guardian.

“No, sir,” returned Mrs. Blinder, “he was nothing but a follerers. When he first came to lodge here, I didn’t know what he was, and I confess that when I found out I gave him notice. It wasn’t liked in the yard. It wasn’t approved by the other lodgers. It is NOT a genteel calling,” said Mrs. Blinder, “and most people do object to it. Mr. Gridley objected to it very strong, and he is a good lodger, though his temper has been hard tried.”

“So you gave him notice?” said my guardian.

“So I gave him notice,” said Mrs. Blinder. “But really when the time came, and I knew no other ill of him, I was in doubts. He was punctual and diligent; he did what he had to do, sir,” said Mrs. Blinder, unconsciously fixing Mr. Skimpole with her eye, “and it’s something in this world even to do that.”

“So you kept him after all?”

“Why, I said that if he could arrange with Mr. Gridley, I could arrange it with the other lodgers and should not so much mind its being liked or disliked in the yard. Mr. Gridley gave his consent gruff—but gave it. He was always gruff with him, but he has been kind to the children since. A person is never known till a person is proved.”

“Have many people been kind to the children?” asked Mr. Jarndyce.

“Upon the whole, not so bad, sir,” said Mrs. Blinder; “but certainly not so many as would have been if their father’s calling had been different. Mr. Coavins gave a guinea, and the follerers made up a little purse. Some neighbours in the yard that had always joked and tapped their shoulders when he went by came forward with a little subscription, and—in general—not so bad. Similarly with Charlotte. Some people won’t employ her because she was a follerer’s child; some people that do employ her cast it at her; some make a merit of having her to work for them, with that and all her draw-backs upon her, and perhaps pay her less and put upon her more. But she’s patienter than others would be, and is clever too, and always willing, up to the full mark of her strength and over. So I should say, in general, not

so bad, sir, but might be better."

Mrs. Blinder sat down to give herself a more favourable opportunity of recovering her breath, exhausted anew by so much talking before it was fully restored. Mr. Jarndyce was turning to speak to us when his attention was attracted by the abrupt entrance into the room of the Mr. Gridley who had been mentioned and whom we had seen on our way up.

"I don't know what you may be doing here, ladies and gentlemen," he said, as if he resented our presence, "but you'll excuse my coming in. I don't come in to stare about me. Well, Charley! Well, Tom! Well, little one! How is it with us all to-day?"

He bent over the group in a caressing way and clearly was regarded as a friend by the children, though his face retained its stern character and his manner to us was as rude as it could be. My guardian noticed it and respected it.

"No one, surely, would come here to stare about him," he said mildly.

"May be so, sir, may be so," returned the other, taking Tom upon his knee and waving him off impatiently. "I don't want to argue with ladies and gentlemen. I have had enough of arguing to last one man his life."

"You have sufficient reason, I dare say," said Mr. Jarndyce, "for being chafed and irritated—"

"There again!" exclaimed the man, becoming violently angry. "I am of a quarrelsome temper. I am irascible. I am not polite!"

"Not very, I think."

"Sir," said Gridley, putting down the child and going up to him as if he meant to strike him, "do you know anything of Courts of Equity?"

"Perhaps I do, to my sorrow."

"To your sorrow?" said the man, pausing in his wrath, "if so, I beg your pardon. I am not polite, I know. I beg your pardon! Sir," with renewed violence, "I have been dragged for five and twenty years over burning iron, and I have lost the habit of treading upon velvet. Go into the Court of Chancery yonder and ask what is one of the standing jokes that brighten up their business sometimes, and they will tell you that the best joke they have is the man from Shropshire. I," he said, beating one hand on the other passionately, "am the man from Shropshire."

"I believe I and my family have also had the honour of furnishing some entertainment in the same grave place," said my guardian composedly.

“You may have heard my name—Jarndyce.”

“Mr. Jarndyce,” said Gridley with a rough sort of salutation, “you bear your wrongs more quietly than I can bear mine. More than that, I tell you—and I tell this gentleman, and these young ladies, if they are friends of yours—that if I took my wrongs in any other way, I should be driven mad! It is only by resenting them, and by revenging them in my mind, and by angrily demanding the justice I never get, that I am able to keep my wits together. It is only that!” he said, speaking in a homely, rustic way and with great vehemence. “You may tell me that I over-excite myself. I answer that it’s in my nature to do it, under wrong, and I must do it. There’s nothing between doing it, and sinking into the smiling state of the poor little mad woman that haunts the court. If I was once to sit down under it, I should become imbecile.”

The passion and heat in which he was, and the manner in which his face worked, and the violent gestures with which he accompanied what he said, were most painful to see.

“Mr. Jarndyce,” he said, “consider my case. As true as there is a heaven above us, this is my case. I am one of two brothers. My father (a farmer) made a will and left his farm and stock and so forth to my mother for her life. After my mother’s death, all was to come to me except a legacy of three hundred pounds that I was then to pay my brother. My mother died. My brother some time afterwards claimed his legacy. I and some of my relations said that he had had a part of it already in board and lodging and some other things. Now mind! That was the question, and nothing else. No one disputed the will; no one disputed anything but whether part of that three hundred pounds had been already paid or not. To settle that question, my brother filing a bill, I was obliged to go into this accursed Chancery; I was forced there because the law forced me and would let me go nowhere else. Seventeen people were made defendants to that simple suit! It first came on after two years. It was then stopped for another two years while the master (may his head rot off!) inquired whether I was my father’s son, about which there was no dispute at all with any mortal creature. He then found out that there were not defendants enough—remember, there were only seventeen as yet!—but that we must have another who had been left out and must begin all over again. The costs at that time—before the thing was begun!—were three times the legacy. My brother would have given up

the legacy, and joyful, to escape more costs. My whole estate, left to me in that will of my father's, has gone in costs. The suit, still undecided, has fallen into rack, and ruin, and despair, with everything else—and here I stand, this day! Now, Mr. Jarndyce, in your suit there are thousands and thousands involved, where in mine there are hundreds. Is mine less hard to bear or is it harder to bear, when my whole living was in it and has been thus shamefully sucked away?"

Mr. Jarndyce said that he condoled with him with all his heart and that he set up no monopoly himself in being unjustly treated by this monstrous system.

"There again!" said Mr. Gridley with no diminution of his rage. "The system! I am told on all hands, it's the system. I mustn't look to individuals. It's the system. I mustn't go into court and say, 'My Lord, I beg to know this from you—is this right or wrong? Have you the face to tell me I have received justice and therefore am dismissed?' My Lord knows nothing of it. He sits there to administer the system. I mustn't go to Mr. Tulkinghorn, the solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and say to him when he makes me furious by being so cool and satisfied—as they all do, for I know they gain by it while I lose, don't I?—I mustn't say to him, 'I will have something out of some one for my ruin, by fair means or foul!' HE is not responsible. It's the system. But, if I do no violence to any of them, here—I may! I don't know what may happen if I am carried beyond myself at last! I will accuse the individual workers of that system against me, face to face, before the great eternal bar!"

His passion was fearful. I could not have believed in such rage without seeing it.

"I have done!" he said, sitting down and wiping his face. "Mr. Jarndyce, I have done! I am violent, I know. I ought to know it. I have been in prison for contempt of court. I have been in prison for threatening the solicitor. I have been in this trouble, and that trouble, and shall be again. I am the man from Shropshire, and I sometimes go beyond amusing them, though they have found it amusing, too, to see me committed into custody and brought up in custody and all that. It would be better for me, they tell me, if I restrained myself. I tell them that if I did restrain myself I should become imbecile. I was a good-enough-tempered man once, I believe. People in my part of the country say they remember me so, but now I must have this vent

under my sense of injury or nothing could hold my wits together. It would be far better for you, Mr. Gridley,' the Lord Chancellor told me last week, 'not to waste your time here, and to stay, usefully employed, down in Shropshire.' 'My Lord, my Lord, I know it would,' said I to him, 'and it would have been far better for me never to have heard the name of your high office, but unhappily for me, I can't undo the past, and the past drives me here!' Besides," he added, breaking fiercely out, "I'll shame them. To the last, I'll show myself in that court to its shame. If I knew when I was going to die, and could be carried there, and had a voice to speak with, I would die there, saying, 'You have brought me here and sent me from here many and many a time. Now send me out feet foremost!'"

His countenance had, perhaps for years, become so set in its contentious expression that it did not soften, even now when he was quiet.

"I came to take these babies down to my room for an hour," he said, going to them again, "and let them play about. I didn't mean to say all this, but it don't much signify. You're not afraid of me, Tom, are you?"

"No!" said Tom. "You ain't angry with ME."

"You are right, my child. You're going back, Charley? Aye? Come then, little one!" He took the youngest child on his arm, where she was willing enough to be carried. "I shouldn't wonder if we found a ginger-bread soldier downstairs. Let's go and look for him!"

He made his former rough salutation, which was not deficient in a certain respect, to Mr. Jarndyce, and bowing slightly to us, went downstairs to his room.

Upon that, Mr. Skimpole began to talk, for the first time since our arrival, in his usual gay strain. He said, Well, it was really very pleasant to see how things lazily adapted themselves to purposes. Here was this Mr. Gridley, a man of a robust will and surprising energy—intellectually speaking, a sort of inharmonious blacksmith—and he could easily imagine that there Gridley was, years ago, wandering about in life for something to expend his superfluous combativeness upon—a sort of Young Love among the thorns—when the Court of Chancery came in his way and accommodated him with the exact thing he wanted. There they were, matched, ever afterwards! Otherwise he might have been a great general, blowing up all sorts of towns, or he might have been a great politician, dealing in all sorts of parliamentary rhetoric; but as it was, he and the Court

of Chancery had fallen upon each other in the pleasantest way, and nobody was much the worse, and Gridley was, so to speak, from that hour provided for. Then look at Coavinses! How delightfully poor Coavinses (father of these charming children) illustrated the same principle! He, Mr. Skimpole, himself, had sometimes repined at the existence of Coavinses. He had found Coavinses in his way. He could had dispensed with Coavinses. There had been times when, if he had been a sultan, and his grand vizier had said one morning, “What does the Commander of the Faithful require at the hands of his slave?” he might have even gone so far as to reply, “The head of Coavinses!” But what turned out to be the case? That, all that time, he had been giving employment to a most deserving man, that he had been a benefactor to Coavinses, that he had actually been enabling Coavinses to bring up these charming children in this agreeable way, developing these social virtues! Insomuch that his heart had just now swelled and the tears had come into his eyes when he had looked round the room and thought, “I was the great patron of Coavinses, and his little comforts were MY work!”

There was something so captivating in his light way of touching these fantastic strings, and he was such a mirthful child by the side of the graver childhood we had seen, that he made my guardian smile even as he turned towards us from a little private talk with Mrs. Blinder. We kissed Charley, and took her downstairs with us, and stopped outside the house to see her run away to her work. I don’t know where she was going, but we saw her run, such a little, little creature in her womanly bonnet and apron, through a covered way at the bottom of the court and melt into the city’s strife and sound like a dewdrop in an ocean.

CHAPTER XVI

Tom-all-Alone’s

MY LADY DEDLOCK IS restless, very restless. The astonished fashionable intelligence hardly knows where to have her. To-day she is at Chesney Wold; yesterday she was at her house in town; to-morrow she may be abroad, for anything the fashionable intelligence can with confidence predict. Even Sir Leicester’s gallantry has some trouble to keep pace with her. It would have more but that his other faithful ally, for better and for worse—the gout—darts into the old oak bed-chamber at Chesney Wold and grips him by both legs.

Sir Leicester receives the gout as a troublesome demon, but still a demon of the patrician order. All the Dedlocks, in the direct male line, through a course of time during and beyond which the memory of man goeth not to the contrary, have had the gout. It can be proved, sir. Other men’s fathers may have died of the rheumatism or may have taken base contagion from the tainted blood of the sick vulgar, but the Dedlock family have communicated something exclusive even to the levelling process of dying by dying of their own family gout. It has come down through the illustrious line like the plate, or the pictures, or the place in Lincolnshire. It is among their dignities. Sir Leicester is perhaps not wholly without an impression, though he has never resolved it into words, that the angel of death in the discharge of his necessary duties may observe to the shades of the aristocracy, “My lords and gentlemen, I have the honour to present to you another Dedlock certified to have arrived per the family gout.”

Hence Sir Leicester yields up his family legs to the family disorder as if he held his name and fortune on that feudal tenure. He feels that for a Dedlock to be laid upon his back and spasmodically twitched and stabbed in his extremities is a liberty taken somewhere, but he thinks, “We have all yielded to this; it belongs to us; it has for some hundreds of years been understood that we are not to make the vaults in the park interesting on more ignoble terms; and I submit myself to the compromise.”

And a goodly show he makes, lying in a flush of crimson and gold in the midst of the great drawing-room before his favourite picture of my Lady, with broad strips of sunlight shining in, down the long perspective, through the long line of windows, and alternating with soft reliefs of shadow. Outside, the stately oaks, rooted for ages in the green ground which has never known ploughshare, but was still a chase when kings rode to battle with sword and shield and rode a-hunting with bow and arrow, bear witness to his greatness. Inside, his forefathers, looking on him from the walls, say, "Each of us was a passing reality here and left this coloured shadow of himself and melted into remembrance as dreamy as the distant voices of the rooks now lulling you to rest," and hear their testimony to his greatness too. And he is very great this day. And woe to Boythorn or other daring wight who shall presumptuously contest an inch with him!

My Lady is at present represented, near Sir Leicester, by her portrait. She has flitted away to town, with no intention of remaining there, and will soon flit hither again, to the confusion of the fashionable intelligence. The house in town is not prepared for her reception. It is muffled and dreary. Only one Mercury in powder gapes disconsolate at the hall-window; and he mentioned last night to another Mercury of his acquaintance, also accustomed to good society, that if that sort of thing was to last—which it couldn't, for a man of his spirits couldn't bear it, and a man of his figure couldn't be expected to bear it—there would be no resource for him, upon his honour, but to cut his throat!

What connexion can there be between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabout of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world who from opposite sides of great gulfs have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together!

Jo sweeps his crossing all day long, unconscious of the link, if any link there be. He sums up his mental condition when asked a question by replying that he "don't know nothink." He knows that it's hard to keep the mud off the crossing in dirty weather, and harder still to live by doing it. Nobody taught him even that much; he found it out.

Jo lives—that is to say, Jo has not yet died—in a ruinous place known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black, dilapidated

street, avoided by all decent people, where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants who after establishing their own possession took to letting them out in lodgings. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years—though born expressly to do it.

Twice lately there has been a crash and a cloud of dust, like the springing of a mine, in Tom-all-Alone's; and each time a house has fallen. These accidents have made a paragraph in the newspapers and have filled a bed or two in the nearest hospital. The gaps remain, and there are not unpopular lodgings among the rubbish. As several more houses are nearly ready to go, the next crash in Tom-all-Alone's may be expected to be a good one.

This desirable property is in Chancery, of course. It would be an insult to the discernment of any man with half an eye to tell him so. Whether "Tom" is the popular representative of the original plaintiff or defendant in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, or whether Tom lived here when the suit had laid the street waste, all alone, until other settlers came to join him, or whether the traditional title is a comprehensive name for a retreat cut off from honest company and put out of the pale of hope, perhaps nobody knows. Certainly Jo don't know.

"For I don't," says Jo, "I don't know nothink."

It must be a strange state to be like Jo! To shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes, and in utter darkness as to the meaning, of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of streets, and on the doors, and in the windows! To see people read, and to see people write, and to see the postmen deliver letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language—to be, to every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb! It must be very puzzling to see the good company going to the churches on Sundays, with their books in their hands, and to think (for perhaps Jo DOES think at odd times) what does it all mean, and if it means anything to anybody, how comes it that it means nothing to me? To be hustled, and

jostled, and moved on; and really to feel that it would appear to be perfectly true that I have no business here, or there, or anywhere; and yet to be perplexed by the consideration that I AM here somehow, too, and everybody overlooked me until I became the creature that I am! It must be a strange state, not merely to be told that I am scarcely human (as in the case of my offering myself for a witness), but to feel it of my own knowledge all my life! To see the horses, dogs, and cattle go by me and to know that in ignorance I belong to them and not to the superior beings in my shape, whose delicacy I offend! Jo's ideas of a criminal trial, or a judge, or a bishop, or a government, or that inestimable jewel to him (if he only knew it) the Constitution, should be strange! His whole material and immaterial life is wonderfully strange; his death, the strangest thing of all.

Jo comes out of Tom-all-Alone's, meeting the tardy morning which is always late in getting down there, and munches his dirty bit of bread as he comes along. His way lying through many streets, and the houses not yet being open, he sits down to breakfast on the door-step of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and gives it a brush when he has finished as an acknowledgment of the accommodation. He admires the size of the edifice and wonders what it's all about. He has no idea, poor wretch, of the spiritual destitution of a coral reef in the Pacific or what it costs to look up the precious souls among the coco-nuts and bread-fruit.

He goes to his crossing and begins to lay it out for the day. The town awakes; the great tee-totum is set up for its daily spin and whirl; all that unaccountable reading and writing, which has been suspended for a few hours, recommences. Jo and the other lower animals get on in the unintelligible mess as they can. It is market-day. The blinded oxen, over-goaded, over-driven, never guided, run into wrong places and are beaten out, and plunge red-eyed and foaming at stone walls, and often sorely hurt the innocent, and often sorely hurt themselves. Very like Jo and his order; very, very like!

A band of music comes and plays. Jo listens to it. So does a dog—a drover's dog, waiting for his master outside a butcher's shop, and evidently thinking about those sheep he has had upon his mind for some hours and is happily rid of. He seems perplexed respecting three or four, can't remember where he left them, looks up and down the street as half expecting to see them astray, suddenly pricks up his ears and remembers all about it. A

thoroughly vagabond dog, accustomed to low company and public-houses; a terrific dog to sheep, ready at a whistle to scamper over their backs and tear out mouthfuls of their wool; but an educated, improved, developed dog who has been taught his duties and knows how to discharge them. He and Jo listen to the music, probably with much the same amount of animal satisfaction; likewise as to awakened association, aspiration, or regret, melancholy or joyful reference to things beyond the senses, they are probably upon a par. But, otherwise, how far above the human listener is the brute!

Turn that dog's descendants wild, like Jo, and in a very few years they will so degenerate that they will lose even their bark—but not their bite.

The day changes as it wears itself away and becomes dark and drizzly. Jo fights it out at his crossing among the mud and wheels, the horses, whips, and umbrellas, and gets but a scanty sum to pay for the unsavoury shelter of Tom-all-Alone's. Twilight comes on; gas begins to start up in the shops; the lamplighter, with his ladder, runs along the margin of the pavement. A wretched evening is beginning to close in.

In his chambers Mr. Tulkinghorn sits meditating an application to the nearest magistrate to-morrow morning for a warrant. Gridley, a disappointed suitor, has been here to-day and has been alarming. We are not to be put in bodily fear, and that ill-conditioned fellow shall be held to bail again. From the ceiling, foreshortened Allegory, in the person of one impossible Roman upside down, points with the arm of Samson (out of joint, and an odd one) obtrusively toward the window. Why should Mr. Tulkinghorn, for such no reason, look out of window? Is the hand not always pointing there? So he does not look out of window.

And if he did, what would it be to see a woman going by? There are women enough in the world, Mr. Tulkinghorn thinks—too many; they are at the bottom of all that goes wrong in it, though, for the matter of that, they create business for lawyers. What would it be to see a woman going by, even though she were going secretly? They are all secret. Mr. Tulkinghorn knows that very well.

But they are not all like the woman who now leaves him and his house behind, between whose plain dress and her refined manner there is something exceedingly inconsistent. She should be an upper servant by her attire, yet in her air and step, though both are hurried and assumed—as far

as she can assume in the muddy streets, which she treads with an unaccustomed foot—she is a lady. Her face is veiled, and still she sufficiently betrays herself to make more than one of those who pass her look round sharply.

She never turns her head. Lady or servant, she has a purpose in her and can follow it. She never turns her head until she comes to the crossing where Jo plies with his broom. He crosses with her and begs. Still, she does not turn her head until she has landed on the other side. Then she slightly beckons to him and says, “Come here!”

Jo follows her a pace or two into a quiet court.

“Are you the boy I’ve read of in the papers?” she asked behind her veil.

“I don’t know,” says Jo, staring moodily at the veil, “nothink about no papers. I don’t know nothink about nothink at all.”

“Were you examined at an inquest?”

“I don’t know nothink about no—where I was took by the beadle, do you mean?” says Jo. “Was the boy’s name at the inkwhich Jo?”

“Yes.”

“That’s me!” says Jo.

“Come farther up.”

“You mean about the man?” says Jo, following. “Him as wos dead?”

“Hush! Speak in a whisper! Yes. Did he look, when he was living, so very ill and poor?”

“Oh, jist!” says Jo.

“Did he look like—not like YOU?” says the woman with abhorrence.

“Oh, not so bad as me,” says Jo. “I’m a reg’lar one I am! You didn’t know him, did you?”

“How dare you ask me if I knew him?”

“No offence, my lady,” says Jo with much humility, for even he has got at the suspicion of her being a lady.

“I am not a lady. I am a servant.”

“You are a jolly servant!” says Jo without the least idea of saying anything offensive, merely as a tribute of admiration.

“Listen and be silent. Don’t talk to me, and stand farther from me! Can you show me all those places that were spoken of in the account I read? The place he wrote for, the place he died at, the place where you were taken to, and the place where he was buried? Do you know the place where he was

buried?”

Jo answers with a nod, having also nodded as each other place was mentioned.

“Go before me and show me all those dreadful places. Stop opposite to each, and don’t speak to me unless I speak to you. Don’t look back. Do what I want, and I will pay you well.”

Jo attends closely while the words are being spoken; tells them off on his broom-handle, finding them rather hard; pauses to consider their meaning; considers it satisfactory; and nods his ragged head.

“I’m fly,” says Jo. “But fen larks, you know. Stow hooking it!”

“What does the horrible creature mean?” exclaims the servant, recoiling from him.

“Stow cutting away, you know!” says Jo.

“I don’t understand you. Go on before! I will give you more money than you ever had in your life.”

Jo screws up his mouth into a whistle, gives his ragged head a rub, takes his broom under his arm, and leads the way, passing deftly with his bare feet over the hard stones and through the mud and mire.

Cook’s Court. Jo stops. A pause.

“Who lives here?”

“Him wot give him his writing and give me half a bull,” says Jo in a whisper without looking over his shoulder.

“Go on to the next.”

Krook’s house. Jo stops again. A longer pause.

“Who lives here?”

“HE lived here,” Jo answers as before.

After a silence he is asked, “In which room?”

“In the back room up there. You can see the winder from this corner. Up there! That’s where I see him stritched out. This is the public-ouse where I was took to.”

“Go on to the next!”

It is a longer walk to the next, but Jo, relieved of his first suspicions, sticks to the forms imposed upon him and does not look round. By many devious ways, reeking with offence of many kinds, they come to the little tunnel of a court, and to the gas-lamp (lighted now), and to the iron gate.

“He was put there,” says Jo, holding to the bars and looking in.

“Where? Oh, what a scene of horror!”

“There!” says Jo, pointing. “Over yinder. Among them piles of bones, and close to that there kitchin winder! They put him wery nigh the top. They was obliged to stamp upon it to git it in. I could unkiver it for you with my broom if the gate was open. That’s why they locks it, I s’pose,” giving it a shake. “It’s always locked. Look at the rat!” cries Jo, excited. “Hi! Look! There he goes! Ho! Into the ground!”

The servant shrinks into a corner, into a corner of that hideous archway, with its deadly stains contaminating her dress; and putting out her two hands and passionately telling him to keep away from her, for he is loathsome to her, so remains for some moments. Jo stands staring and is still staring when she recovers herself.

“Is this place of abomination consecrated ground?”

“I don’t know nothink of consequential ground,” says Jo, still staring.

“Is it blessed?”

“Which?” says Jo, in the last degree amazed.

“Is it blessed?”

“I’m blest if I know,” says Jo, staring more than ever; “but I shouldn’t think it warn’t. Blest?” repeats Jo, something troubled in his mind. “It an’t done it much good if it is. Blest? I should think it was t’othered myself. But I don’t know nothink!”

The servant takes as little heed of what he says as she seems to take of what she has said herself. She draws off her glove to get some money from her purse. Jo silently notices how white and small her hand is and what a jolly servant she must be to wear such sparkling rings.

She drops a piece of money in his hand without touching it, and shuddering as their hands approach. “Now,” she adds, “show me the spot again!”

Jo thrusts the handle of his broom between the bars of the gate, and with his utmost power of elaboration, points it out. At length, looking aside to see if he has made himself intelligible, he finds that he is alone.

His first proceeding is to hold the piece of money to the gas-light and to be overpowered at finding that it is yellow—gold. His next is to give it a one-sided bite at the edge as a test of its quality. His next, to put it in his mouth for safety and to sweep the step and passage with great care. His job done, he sets off for Tom-all-Alone’s, stopping in the light of innumerable

gas-lamps to produce the piece of gold and give it another one-sided bite as a reassurance of its being genuine.

The Mercury in powder is in no want of society to-night, for my Lady goes to a grand dinner and three or four balls. Sir Leicester is fidgety down at Chesney Wold, with no better company than the gout; he complains to Mrs. Rouncewell that the rain makes such a monotonous pattering on the terrace that he can’t read the paper even by the fireside in his own snug dressing-room.

“Sir Leicester would have done better to try the other side of the house, my dear,” says Mrs. Rouncewell to Rosa. “His dressing-room is on my Lady’s side. And in all these years I never heard the step upon the Ghost’s Walk more distinct than it is to-night!”

CHAPTER XVII

Esther’s Narrative

RICHARD VERY OFTEN CAME to see us while we remained in London (though he soon failed in his letter-writing), and with his quick abilities, his good spirits, his good temper, his gaiety and freshness, was always delightful. But though I liked him more and more the better I knew him, I still felt more and more how much it was to be regretted that he had been educated in no habits of application and concentration. The system which had addressed him in exactly the same manner as it had addressed hundreds of other boys, all varying in character and capacity, had enabled him to dash through his tasks, always with fair credit and often with distinction, but in a fitful, dazzling way that had confirmed his reliance on those very qualities in himself which it had been most desirable to direct and train. They were good qualities, without which no high place can be meritoriously won, but like fire and water, though excellent servants, they were very bad masters. If they had been under Richard’s direction, they would have been his friends; but Richard being under their direction, they became his enemies.

I write down these opinions not because I believe that this or any other thing was so because I thought so, but only because I did think so and I want to be quite candid about all I thought and did. These were my thoughts about Richard. I thought I often observed besides how right my guardian was in what he had said, and that the uncertainties and delays of the Chancery suit had imparted to his nature something of the careless spirit of a gamester who felt that he was part of a great gaming system.

Mr. and Mrs. Bayham Badger coming one afternoon when my guardian was not at home, in the course of conversation I naturally inquired after Richard.

“Why, Mr. Carstone,” said Mrs. Badger, “is very well and is, I assure you, a great acquisition to our society. Captain Swosser used to say of me that I was always better than land a-head and a breeze a-starn to the midshipmen’s mess when the purser’s junk had become as tough as the

fore-topsel weather earings. It was his naval way of mentioning generally that I was an acquisition to any society. I may render the same tribute, I am sure, to Mr. Carstone. But I—you won't think me premature if I mention it?"

I said no, as Mrs. Badger's insinuating tone seemed to require such an answer.

"Nor Miss Clare?" said Mrs. Bayham Badger sweetly.

Ada said no, too, and looked uneasy.

"Why, you see, my dears," said Mrs. Badger, "—you'll excuse me calling you my dears?"

We entreated Mrs. Badger not to mention it.

"Because you really are, if I may take the liberty of saying so," pursued Mrs. Badger, "so perfectly charming. You see, my dears, that although I am still young—or Mr. Bayham Badger pays me the compliment of saying so —"

"No," Mr. Badger called out like some one contradicting at a public meeting. "Not at all!"

"Very well," smiled Mrs. Badger, "we will say still young."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Badger.

"My dears, though still young, I have had many opportunities of observing young men. There were many such on board the dear old Crippler, I assure you. After that, when I was with Captain Swosser in the Mediterranean, I embraced every opportunity of knowing and befriending the midshipmen under Captain Swosser's command. YOU never heard them called the young gentlemen, my dears, and probably would not understand allusions to their pipe-claying their weekly accounts, but it is otherwise with me, for blue water has been a second home to me, and I have been quite a sailor. Again, with Professor Dingo."

"A man of European reputation," murmured Mr. Badger.

"When I lost my dear first and became the wife of my dear second," said Mrs. Badger, speaking of her former husbands as if they were parts of a charade, "I still enjoyed opportunities of observing youth. The class attendant on Professor Dingo's lectures was a large one, and it became my pride, as the wife of an eminent scientific man seeking herself in science the utmost consolation it could impart, to throw our house open to the students as a kind of Scientific Exchange. Every Tuesday evening there was

lemonade and a mixed biscuit for all who chose to partake of those refreshments. And there was science to an unlimited extent."

"Remarkable assemblies those, Miss Summerson," said Mr. Badger reverentially. "There must have been great intellectual friction going on there under the auspices of such a man!"

"And now," pursued Mrs. Badger, "now that I am the wife of my dear third, Mr. Badger, I still pursue those habits of observation which were formed during the lifetime of Captain Swosser and adapted to new and unexpected purposes during the lifetime of Professor Dingo. I therefore have not come to the consideration of Mr. Carstone as a neophyte. And yet I am very much of the opinion, my dears, that he has not chosen his profession advisedly."

Ada looked so very anxious now that I asked Mrs. Badger on what she founded her supposition.

"My dear Miss Summerson," she replied, "on Mr. Carstone's character and conduct. He is of such a very easy disposition that probably he would never think it worth-while to mention how he really feels, but he feels languid about the profession. He has not that positive interest in it which makes it his vocation. If he has any decided impression in reference to it, I should say it was that it is a tiresome pursuit. Now, this is not promising. Young men like Mr. Allan Woodcourt who take it from a strong interest in all that it can do will find some reward in it through a great deal of work for a very little money and through years of considerable endurance and disappointment. But I am quite convinced that this would never be the case with Mr. Carstone."

"Does Mr. Badger think so too?" asked Ada timidly.

"Why," said Mr. Badger, "to tell the truth, Miss Clare, this view of the matter had not occurred to me until Mrs. Badger mentioned it. But when Mrs. Badger put it in that light, I naturally gave great consideration to it, knowing that Mrs. Badger's mind, in addition to its natural advantages, has had the rare advantage of being formed by two such very distinguished (I will even say illustrious) public men as Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy and Professor Dingo. The conclusion at which I have arrived is—in short, is Mrs. Badger's conclusion."

"It was a maxim of Captain Swosser's," said Mrs. Badger, "speaking in his figurative naval manner, that when you make pitch hot, you cannot

make it too hot; and that if you only have to swab a plank, you should swab it as if Davy Jones were after you. It appears to me that this maxim is applicable to the medical as well as to the nautical profession.

"To all professions," observed Mr. Badger. "It was admirably said by Captain Swosser. Beautifully said."

"People objected to Professor Dingo when we were staying in the north of Devon after our marriage," said Mrs. Badger, "that he disfigured some of the houses and other buildings by chipping off fragments of those edifices with his little geological hammer. But the professor replied that he knew of no building save the Temple of Science. The principle is the same, I think?"

"Precisely the same," said Mr. Badger. "Finely expressed! The professor made the same remark, Miss Summerson, in his last illness, when (his mind wandering) he insisted on keeping his little hammer under the pillow and chipping at the countenances of the attendants. The ruling passion!"

Although we could have dispensed with the length at which Mr. and Mrs. Badger pursued the conversation, we both felt that it was disinterested in them to express the opinion they had communicated to us and that there was a great probability of its being sound. We agreed to say nothing to Mr. Jarndyce until we had spoken to Richard; and as he was coming next evening, we resolved to have a very serious talk with him.

So after he had been a little while with Ada, I went in and found my darling (as I knew she would be) prepared to consider him thoroughly right in whatever he said.

"And how do you get on, Richard?" said I. I always sat down on the other side of him. He made quite a sister of me.

"Oh! Well enough!" said Richard.

"He can't say better than that, Esther, can he?" cried my pet triumphantly.

I tried to look at my pet in the wisest manner, but of course I couldn't.

"Well enough?" I repeated.

"Yes," said Richard, "well enough. It's rather jog-trotty and humdrum. But it'll do as well as anything else!"

"Oh! My dear Richard!" I remonstrated.

"What's the matter?" said Richard.

"Do as well as anything else!"

"I don't think there's any harm in that, Dame Durden," said Ada, looking

so confidingly at me across him; “because if it will do as well as anything else, it will do very well, I hope.”

“Oh, yes, I hope so,” returned Richard, carelessly tossing his hair from his forehead. “After all, it may be only a kind of probation till our suit is—I forgot though. I am not to mention the suit. Forbidden ground! Oh, yes, it’s all right enough. Let us talk about something else.”

Ada would have done so willingly, and with a full persuasion that we had brought the question to a most satisfactory state. But I thought it would be useless to stop there, so I began again.

“No, but Richard,” said I, “and my dear Ada! Consider how important it is to you both, and what a point of honour it is towards your cousin, that you, Richard, should be quite in earnest without any reservation. I think we had better talk about this, really, Ada. It will be too late very soon.”

“Oh, yes! We must talk about it!” said Ada. “But I think Richard is right.”

What was the use of my trying to look wise when she was so pretty, and so engaging, and so fond of him!

“Mr. and Mrs. Badger were here yesterday, Richard,” said I, “and they seemed disposed to think that you had no great liking for the profession.”

“Did they though?” said Richard. “Oh! Well, that rather alters the case, because I had no idea that they thought so, and I should not have liked to disappoint or inconvenience them. The fact is, I don’t care much about it. But, oh, it don’t matter! It’ll do as well as anything else!”

“You hear him, Ada!” said I.

“The fact is,” Richard proceeded, half thoughtfully and half jocosely, “it is not quite in my way. I don’t take to it. And I get too much of Mrs. Bayham Badger’s first and second.”

“I am sure THAT’S very natural!” cried Ada, quite delighted. “The very thing we both said yesterday, Esther!”

“Then,” pursued Richard, “it’s monotonous, and to-day is too like yesterday, and to-morrow is too like to-day.”

“But I am afraid,” said I, “this is an objection to all kinds of application —to life itself, except under some very uncommon circumstances.”

“Do you think so?” returned Richard, still considering. “Perhaps! Ha! Why, then, you know,” he added, suddenly becoming gay again, “we travel outside a circle to what I said just now. It’ll do as well as anything else. Oh,

it’s all right enough! Let us talk about something else.”

But even Ada, with her loving face—and if it had seemed innocent and trusting when I first saw it in that memorable November fog, how much more did it seem now when I knew her innocent and trusting heart—even Ada shook her head at this and looked serious. So I thought it a good opportunity to hint to Richard that if he were sometimes a little careless of himself, I was very sure he never meant to be careless of Ada, and that it was a part of his affectionate consideration for her not to slight the importance of a step that might influence both their lives. This made him almost grave.

“My dear Mother Hubbard,” he said, “that’s the very thing! I have thought of that several times and have been quite angry with myself for meaning to be so much in earnest and—somehow—not exactly being so. I don’t know how it is; I seem to want something or other to stand by. Even you have no idea how fond I am of Ada (my darling cousin, I love you, so much!), but I don’t settle down to constancy in other things. It’s such uphill work, and it takes such a time!” said Richard with an air of vexation.

“That may be,” I suggested, “because you don’t like what you have chosen.”

“Poor fellow!” said Ada. “I am sure I don’t wonder at it!”

No. It was not of the least use my trying to look wise. I tried again, but how could I do it, or how could it have any effect if I could, while Ada rested her clasped hands upon his shoulder and while he looked at her tender blue eyes, and while they looked at him!

“You see, my precious girl,” said Richard, passing her golden curls through and through his hand, “I was a little hasty perhaps; or I misunderstood my own inclinations perhaps. They don’t seem to lie in that direction. I couldn’t tell till I tried. Now the question is whether it’s worth-while to undo all that has been done. It seems like making a great disturbance about nothing particular.”

“My dear Richard,” said I, “how CAN you say about nothing particular?”

“I don’t mean absolutely that,” he returned. “I mean that it MAY be nothing particular because I may never want it.”

Both Ada and I urged, in reply, not only that it was decidedly worth-while to undo what had been done, but that it must be undone. I then asked Richard whether he had thought of any more congenial pursuit.

“There, my dear Mrs. Shipton,” said Richard, “you touch me home. Yes, I have. I have been thinking that the law is the boy for me.”

“The law!” repeated Ada as if she were afraid of the name.

“If I went into Kenge’s office,” said Richard, “and if I were placed under articles to Kenge, I should have my eye on the—hum!—the forbidden ground—and should be able to study it, and master it, and to satisfy myself that it was not neglected and was being properly conducted. I should be able to look after Ada’s interests and my own interests (the same thing!); and I should peg away at Blackstone and all those fellows with the most tremendous ardour.”

I was not by any means so sure of that, and I saw how his hankering after the vague things yet to come of those long-deferred hopes cast a shade on Ada’s face. But I thought it best to encourage him in any project of continuous exertion, and only advised him to be quite sure that his mind was made up now.

“My dear Minerva,” said Richard, “I am as steady as you are. I made a mistake; we are all liable to mistakes; I won’t do so any more, and I’ll become such a lawyer as is not often seen. That is, you know,” said Richard, relapsing into doubt, “if it really is worth-while, after all, to make such a disturbance about nothing particular!”

This led to our saying again, with a great deal of gravity, all that we had said already and to our coming to much the same conclusion afterwards. But we so strongly advised Richard to be frank and open with Mr. Jarndyce, without a moment’s delay, and his disposition was naturally so opposed to concealment that he sought him out at once (taking us with him) and made a full avowal. “Rick,” said my guardian, after hearing him attentively, “we can retreat with honour, and we will. But we must be careful—for our cousin’s sake, Rick, for our cousin’s sake—that we make no more such mistakes. Therefore, in the matter of the law, we will have a good trial before we decide. We will look before we leap, and take plenty of time about it.”

Richard’s energy was of such an impatient and fitful kind that he would have liked nothing better than to have gone to Mr. Kenge’s office in that hour and to have entered into articles with him on the spot. Submitting, however, with a good grace to the caution that we had shown to be so necessary, he contented himself with sitting down among us in his lightest

spirits and talking as if his one unvarying purpose in life from childhood had been that one which now held possession of him. My guardian was very kind and cordial with him, but rather grave, enough so to cause Ada, when he had departed and we were going upstairs to bed, to say, “Cousin John, I hope you don’t think the worse of Richard?”

“No, my love,” said he.

“Because it was very natural that Richard should be mistaken in such a difficult case. It is not uncommon.”

“No, no, my love,” said he. “Don’t look unhappy.”

“Oh, I am not unhappy, cousin John!” said Ada, smiling cheerfully, with her hand upon his shoulder, where she had put it in bidding him good night. “But I should be a little so if you thought at all the worse of Richard.”

“My dear,” said Mr. Jarndyce, “I should think the worse of him only if you were ever in the least unhappy through his means. I should be more disposed to quarrel with myself even then, than with poor Rick, for I brought you together. But, tut, all this is nothing! He has time before him, and the race to run. I think the worse of him? Not I, my loving cousin! And not you, I swear!”

“No, indeed, cousin John,” said Ada, “I am sure I could not—I am sure I would not—think any ill of Richard if the whole world did. I could, and I would, think better of him then than at any other time!”

So quietly and honestly she said it, with her hands upon his shoulders—both hands now—and looking up into his face, like the picture of truth!

“I think,” said my guardian, thoughtfully regarding her, “I think it must be somewhere written that the virtues of the mothers shall occasionally be visited on the children, as well as the sins of the father. Good night, my rosebud. Good night, little woman. Pleasant slumbers! Happy dreams!”

This was the first time I ever saw him follow Ada with his eyes with something of a shadow on their benevolent expression. I well remembered the look with which he had contemplated her and Richard when she was singing in the firelight; it was but a very little while since he had watched them passing down the room in which the sun was shining, and away into the shade; but his glance was changed, and even the silent look of confidence in me which now followed it once more was not quite so hopeful and untroubled as it had originally been.

Ada praised Richard more to me that night than ever she had praised him

yet. She went to sleep with a little bracelet he had given her clasped upon her arm. I fancied she was dreaming of him when I kissed her cheek after she had slept an hour and saw how tranquil and happy she looked.

For I was so little inclined to sleep myself that night that I sat up working. It would not be worth mentioning for its own sake, but I was wakeful and rather low-spirited. I don't know why. At least I don't think I know why. At least, perhaps I do, but I don't think it matters.

At any rate, I made up my mind to be so dreadfully industrious that I would leave myself not a moment's leisure to be low-spirited. For I naturally said, "Esther! You to be low-spirited. YOU!" And it really was time to say so, for I—yes, I really did see myself in the glass, almost crying. "As if you had anything to make you unhappy, instead of everything to make you happy, you ungrateful heart!" said I.

If I could have made myself go to sleep, I would have done it directly, but not being able to do that, I took out of my basket some ornamental work for our house (I mean Bleak House) that I was busy with at that time and sat down to it with great determination. It was necessary to count all the stitches in that work, and I resolved to go on with it until I couldn't keep my eyes open, and then to go to bed.

I soon found myself very busy. But I had left some silk downstairs in a work-table drawer in the temporary growlery, and coming to a stop for want of it, I took my candle and went softly down to get it. To my great surprise, on going in I found my guardian still there, and sitting looking at the ashes. He was lost in thought, his book lay unheeded by his side, his silvered iron-grey hair was scattered confusedly upon his forehead as though his hand had been wandering among it while his thoughts were elsewhere, and his face looked worn. Almost frightened by coming upon him so unexpectedly, I stood still for a moment and should have retired without speaking had he not, in again passing his hand abstractedly through his hair, seen me and started.

"Esther!"

I told him what I had come for.

"At work so late, my dear?"

"I am working late to-night," said I, "because I couldn't sleep and wished to tire myself. But, dear guardian, you are late too, and look weary. You have no trouble, I hope, to keep you waking?"

“None, little woman, that YOU would readily understand,” said he.

He spoke in a regretful tone so new to me that I inwardly repeated, as if that would help me to his meaning, “That I could readily understand!”

“Remain a moment, Esther,” said he, “You were in my thoughts.”

“I hope I was not the trouble, guardian?”

He slightly waved his hand and fell into his usual manner. The change was so remarkable, and he appeared to make it by dint of so much self-command, that I found myself again inwardly repeating, “None that I could understand!”

“Little woman,” said my guardian, “I was thinking—that is, I have been thinking since I have been sitting here—that you ought to know of your own history all I know. It is very little. Next to nothing.”

“Dear guardian,” I replied, “when you spoke to me before on that subject __”

“But since then,” he gravely interposed, anticipating what I meant to say, “I have reflected that your having anything to ask me, and my having anything to tell you, are different considerations, Esther. It is perhaps my duty to impart to you the little I know.”

“If you think so, guardian, it is right.”

“I think so,” he returned very gently, and kindly, and very distinctly. “My dear, I think so now. If any real disadvantage can attach to your position in the mind of any man or woman worth a thought, it is right that you at least of all the world should not magnify it to yourself by having vague impressions of its nature.”

I sat down and said after a little effort to be as calm as I ought to be, “One of my earliest remembrances, guardian, is of these words: ‘Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come, and soon enough, when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can.’” I had covered my face with my hands in repeating the words, but I took them away now with a better kind of shame, I hope, and told him that to him I owed the blessing that I had from my childhood to that hour never, never, never felt it. He put up his hand as if to stop me. I well knew that he was never to be thanked, and said no more.

“Nine years, my dear,” he said after thinking for a little while, “have passed since I received a letter from a lady living in seclusion, written with a stern passion and power that rendered it unlike all other letters I have ever

read. It was written to me (as it told me in so many words), perhaps because it was the writer's idiosyncrasy to put that trust in me, perhaps because it was mine to justify it. It told me of a child, an orphan girl then twelve years old, in some such cruel words as those which live in your remembrance. It told me that the writer had bred her in secrecy from her birth, had blotted out all trace of her existence, and that if the writer were to die before the child became a woman, she would be left entirely friendless, nameless, and unknown. It asked me to consider if I would, in that case, finish what the writer had begun."

I listened in silence and looked attentively at him.

"Your early recollection, my dear, will supply the gloomy medium through which all this was seen and expressed by the writer, and the distorted religion which clouded her mind with impressions of the need there was for the child to expiate an offence of which she was quite innocent. I felt concerned for the little creature, in her darkened life, and replied to the letter."

I took his hand and kissed it.

"It laid the injunction on me that I should never propose to see the writer, who had long been estranged from all intercourse with the world, but who would see a confidential agent if I would appoint one. I accredited Mr. Kenge. The lady said, of her own accord and not of his seeking, that her name was an assumed one. That she was, if there were any ties of blood in such a case, the child's aunt. That more than this she would never (and he was well persuaded of the steadfastness of her resolution) for any human consideration disclose. My dear, I have told you all."

I held his hand for a little while in mine.

"I saw my ward oftener than she saw me," he added, cheerily making light of it, "and I always knew she was beloved, useful, and happy. She repays me twenty-thousandfold, and twenty more to that, every hour in every day!"

"And oftener still," said I, "she blesses the guardian who is a father to her!"

At the word father, I saw his former trouble come into his face. He subdued it as before, and it was gone in an instant; but it had been there and it had come so swiftly upon my words that I felt as if they had given him a shock. I again inwardly repeated, wondering, "That I could readily

understand. None that I could readily understand!” No, it was true. I did not understand it. Not for many and many a day.

“Take a fatherly good night, my dear,” said he, kissing me on the forehead, “and so to rest. These are late hours for working and thinking. You do that for all of us, all day long, little housekeeper!”

I neither worked nor thought any more that night. I opened my grateful heart to heaven in thankfulness for its providence to me and its care of me, and fell asleep.

We had a visitor next day. Mr. Allan Woodcourt came. He came to take leave of us; he had settled to do so beforehand. He was going to China and to India as a surgeon on board ship. He was to be away a long, long time.

I believe—at least I know—that he was not rich. All his widowed mother could spare had been spent in qualifying him for his profession. It was not lucrative to a young practitioner, with very little influence in London; and although he was, night and day, at the service of numbers of poor people and did wonders of gentleness and skill for them, he gained very little by it in money. He was seven years older than I. Not that I need mention it, for it hardly seems to belong to anything.

I think—I mean, he told us—that he had been in practice three or four years and that if he could have hoped to contend through three or four more, he would not have made the voyage on which he was bound. But he had no fortune or private means, and so he was going away. He had been to see us several times altogether. We thought it a pity he should go away. Because he was distinguished in his art among those who knew it best, and some of the greatest men belonging to it had a high opinion of him.

When he came to bid us good-bye, he brought his mother with him for the first time. She was a pretty old lady, with bright black eyes, but she seemed proud. She came from Wales and had had, a long time ago, an eminent person for an ancestor, of the name of Morgan ap-Kerrig—of some place that sounded like Gimlet—who was the most illustrious person that ever was known and all of whose relations were a sort of royal family. He appeared to have passed his life in always getting up into mountains and fighting somebody; and a bard whose name sounded like Crumlinwallinwer had sung his praises in a piece which was called, as nearly as I could catch it, Mewlinnwillinwodd.

Mrs. Woodcourt, after expatiating to us on the fame of her great

kinsman, said that no doubt wherever her son Allan went he would remember his pedigree and would on no account form an alliance below it. She told him that there were many handsome English ladies in India who went out on speculation, and that there were some to be picked up with property, but that neither charms nor wealth would suffice for the descendant from such a line without birth, which must ever be the first consideration. She talked so much about birth that for a moment I half fancied, and with pain—But what an idle fancy to suppose that she could think or care what MINE was!

Mr. Woodcourt seemed a little distressed by her prolixity, but he was too considerate to let her see it and contrived delicately to bring the conversation round to making his acknowledgments to my guardian for his hospitality and for the very happy hours—he called them the very happy hours—he had passed with us. The recollection of them, he said, would go with him wherever he went and would be always treasured. And so we gave him our hands, one after another—at least, they did—and I did; and so he put his lips to Ada's hand—and to mine; and so he went away upon his long, long voyage!

I was very busy indeed all day and wrote directions home to the servants, and wrote notes for my guardian, and dusted his books and papers, and jingled my housekeeping keys a good deal, one way and another. I was still busy between the lights, singing and working by the window, when who should come in but Caddy, whom I had no expectation of seeing!

"Why, Caddy, my dear," said I, "what beautiful flowers!"

She had such an exquisite little nosegay in her hand.

"Indeed, I think so, Esther," replied Caddy. "They are the loveliest I ever saw."

"Prince, my dear?" said I in a whisper.

"No," answered Caddy, shaking her head and holding them to me to smell. "Not Prince."

"Well, to be sure, Caddy!" said I. "You must have two lovers!"

"What? Do they look like that sort of thing?" said Caddy.

"Do they look like that sort of thing?" I repeated, pinching her cheek.

Caddy only laughed in return, and telling me that she had come for half an hour, at the expiration of which time Prince would be waiting for her at the corner, sat chatting with me and Ada in the window, every now and then

handing me the flowers again or trying how they looked against my hair. At last, when she was going, she took me into my room and put them in my dress.

“For me?” said I, surprised.

“For you,” said Caddy with a kiss. “They were left behind by somebody.”

“Left behind?”

“At poor Miss Flite’s,” said Caddy. “Somebody who has been very good to her was hurrying away an hour ago to join a ship and left these flowers behind. No, no! Don’t take them out. Let the pretty little things lie here,” said Caddy, adjusting them with a careful hand, “because I was present myself, and I shouldn’t wonder if somebody left them on purpose!”

“Do they look like that sort of thing?” said Ada, coming laughingly behind me and clasping me merrily round the waist. “Oh, yes, indeed they do, Dame Durden! They look very, very like that sort of thing. Oh, very like it indeed, my dear!”

CHAPTER XVIII

Lady Dedlock

IT WAS NOT SO easy as it had appeared at first to arrange for Richard's making a trial of Mr. Kenge's office. Richard himself was the chief impediment. As soon as he had it in his power to leave Mr. Badger at any moment, he began to doubt whether he wanted to leave him at all. He didn't know, he said, really. It wasn't a bad profession; he couldn't assert that he disliked it; perhaps he liked it as well as he liked any other—suppose he gave it one more chance! Upon that, he shut himself up for a few weeks with some books and some bones and seemed to acquire a considerable fund of information with great rapidity. His fervour, after lasting about a month, began to cool, and when it was quite cooled, began to grow warm again. His vacillations between law and medicine lasted so long that midsummer arrived before he finally separated from Mr. Badger and entered on an experimental course of Messrs. Kenge and Carboy. For all his waywardness, he took great credit to himself as being determined to be in earnest "this time." And he was so good-natured throughout, and in such high spirits, and so fond of Ada, that it was very difficult indeed to be otherwise than pleased with him.

"As to Mr. Jarndyce," who, I may mention, found the wind much given, during this period, to stick in the east; "As to Mr. Jarndyce," Richard would say to me, "he is the finest fellow in the world, Esther! I must be particularly careful, if it were only for his satisfaction, to take myself well to task and have a regular wind-up of this business now."

The idea of his taking himself well to task, with that laughing face and heedless manner and with a fancy that everything could catch and nothing could hold, was ludicrously anomalous. However, he told us between-whiles that he was doing it to such an extent that he wondered his hair didn't turn grey. His regular wind-up of the business was (as I have said) that he went to Mr. Kenge's about midsummer to try how he liked it.

All this time he was, in money affairs, what I have described him in a

former illustration—generous, profuse, wildly careless, but fully persuaded that he was rather calculating and prudent. I happened to say to Ada, in his presence, half jestingly, half seriously, about the time of his going to Mr. Kenge's, that he needed to have Fortunatus' purse, he made so light of money, which he answered in this way, "My jewel of a dear cousin, you hear this old woman! Why does she say that? Because I gave eight pounds odd (or whatever it was) for a certain neat waistcoat and buttons a few days ago. Now, if I had stayed at Badger's I should have been obliged to spend twelve pounds at a blow for some heart-breaking lecture-fees. So I make four pounds—in a lump—by the transaction!"

It was a question much discussed between him and my guardian what arrangements should be made for his living in London while he experimented on the law, for we had long since gone back to Bleak House, and it was too far off to admit of his coming there oftener than once a week. My guardian told me that if Richard were to settle down at Mr. Kenge's he would take some apartments or chambers where we too could occasionally stay for a few days at a time; "but, little woman," he added, rubbing his head very significantly, "he hasn't settled down there yet!" The discussions ended in our hiring for him, by the month, a neat little furnished lodging in a quiet old house near Queen Square. He immediately began to spend all the money he had in buying the oddest little ornaments and luxuries for this lodging; and so often as Ada and I dissuaded him from making any purchase that he had in contemplation which was particularly unnecessary and expensive, he took credit for what it would have cost and made out that to spend anything less on something else was to save the difference.

While these affairs were in abeyance, our visit to Mr. Boythorn's was postponed. At length, Richard having taken possession of his lodging, there was nothing to prevent our departure. He could have gone with us at that time of the year very well, but he was in the full novelty of his new position and was making most energetic attempts to unravel the mysteries of the fatal suit. Consequently we went without him, and my darling was delighted to praise him for being so busy.

We made a pleasant journey down into Lincolnshire by the coach and had an entertaining companion in Mr. Skimpole. His furniture had been all cleared off, it appeared, by the person who took possession of it on his blue-eyed daughter's birthday, but he seemed quite relieved to think that it was

gone. Chairs and table, he said, were wearisome objects; they were monotonous ideas, they had no variety of expression, they looked you out of countenance, and you looked them out of countenance. How pleasant, then, to be bound to no particular chairs and tables, but to sport like a butterfly among all the furniture on hire, and to flit from rosewood to mahogany, and from mahogany to walnut, and from this shape to that, as the humour took one!

"The oddity of the thing is," said Mr. Skimpole with a quickened sense of the ludicrous, "that my chairs and tables were not paid for, and yet my landlord walks off with them as composedly as possible. Now, that seems droll! There is something grotesque in it. The chair and table merchant never engaged to pay my landlord my rent. Why should my landlord quarrel with HIM? If I have a pimple on my nose which is disagreeable to my landlord's peculiar ideas of beauty, my landlord has no business to scratch my chair and table merchant's nose, which has no pimple on it. His reasoning seems defective!"

"Well," said my guardian good-humouredly, "it's pretty clear that whoever became security for those chairs and tables will have to pay for them."

"Exactly!" returned Mr. Skimpole. "That's the crowning point of unreason in the business! I said to my landlord, 'My good man, you are not aware that my excellent friend Jarndyce will have to pay for those things that you are sweeping off in that indelicate manner. Have you no consideration for HIS property?' He hadn't the least."

"And refused all proposals," said my guardian.

"Refused all proposals," returned Mr. Skimpole. "I made him business proposals. I had him into my room. I said, 'You are a man of business, I believe?' He replied, 'I am,' 'Very well,' said I, 'now let us be business-like. Here is an inkstand, here are pens and paper, here are wafers. What do you want? I have occupied your house for a considerable period, I believe to our mutual satisfaction until this unpleasant misunderstanding arose; let us be at once friendly and business-like. What do you want?' In reply to this, he made use of the figurative expression—which has something Eastern about it—that he had never seen the colour of my money. 'My amiable friend,' said I, 'I never have any money. I never know anything about money.' 'Well, sir,' said he, 'what do you offer if I give you time?'

‘My good fellow,’ said I, ‘I have no idea of time; but you say you are a man of business, and whatever you can suggest to be done in a business-like way with pen, and ink, and paper—and wafers—I am ready to do. Don’t pay yourself at another man’s expense (which is foolish), but be business-like!’ However, he wouldn’t be, and there was an end of it.”

If these were some of the inconveniences of Mr. Skimpole’s childhood, it assuredly possessed its advantages too. On the journey he had a very good appetite for such refreshment as came in our way (including a basket of choice hothouse peaches), but never thought of paying for anything. So when the coachman came round for his fee, he pleasantly asked him what he considered a very good fee indeed, now—a liberal one—and on his replying half a crown for a single passenger, said it was little enough too, all things considered, and left Mr. Jarndyce to give it him.

It was delightful weather. The green corn waved so beautifully, the larks sang so joyfully, the hedges were so full of wild flowers, the trees were so thickly out in leaf, the bean-fields, with a light wind blowing over them, filled the air with such a delicious fragrance! Late in the afternoon we came to the market-town where we were to alight from the coach—a dull little town with a church-spire, and a marketplace, and a market-cross, and one intensely sunny street, and a pond with an old horse cooling his legs in it, and a very few men sleepily lying and standing about in narrow little bits of shade. After the rustling of the leaves and the waving of the corn all along the road, it looked as still, as hot, as motionless a little town as England could produce.

At the inn we found Mr. Boythorn on horseback, waiting with an open carriage to take us to his house, which was a few miles off. He was overjoyed to see us and dismounted with great alacrity.

“By heaven!” said he after giving us a courteous greeting. “This a most infamous coach. It is the most flagrant example of an abominable public vehicle that ever encumbered the face of the earth. It is twenty-five minutes after its time this afternoon. The coachman ought to be put to death!”

“IS he after his time?” said Mr. Skimpole, to whom he happened to address himself. “You know my infirmity.”

“Twenty-five minutes! Twenty-six minutes!” replied Mr. Boythorn, referring to his watch. “With two ladies in the coach, this scoundrel has deliberately delayed his arrival six and twenty minutes. Deliberately! It is

impossible that it can be accidental! But his father—and his uncle—were the most profligate coachmen that ever sat upon a box."

While he said this in tones of the greatest indignation, he handed us into the little phaeton with the utmost gentleness and was all smiles and pleasure.

"I am sorry, ladies," he said, standing bare-headed at the carriage-door when all was ready, "that I am obliged to conduct you nearly two miles out of the way. But our direct road lies through Sir Leicester Dedlock's park, and in that fellow's property I have sworn never to set foot of mine, or horse's foot of mine, pending the present relations between us, while I breathe the breath of life!" And here, catching my guardian's eye, he broke into one of his tremendous laughs, which seemed to shake even the motionless little market-town.

"Are the Dedlocks down here, Lawrence?" said my guardian as we drove along and Mr. Boythorn trotted on the green turf by the roadside.

"Sir Arrogant Numskull is here," replied Mr. Boythorn. "Ha ha ha! Sir Arrogant is here, and I am glad to say, has been laid by the heels here. My Lady," in naming whom he always made a courtly gesture as if particularly to exclude her from any part in the quarrel, "is expected, I believe, daily. I am not in the least surprised that she postpones her appearance as long as possible. Whatever can have induced that transcendent woman to marry that effigy and figure-head of a baronet is one of the most impenetrable mysteries that ever baffled human inquiry. Ha ha ha ha!"

"I suppose," said my guardian, laughing, "WE may set foot in the park while we are here? The prohibition does not extend to us, does it?"

"I can lay no prohibition on my guests," he said, bending his head to Ada and me with the smiling politeness which sat so gracefully upon him, "except in the matter of their departure. I am only sorry that I cannot have the happiness of being their escort about Chesney Wold, which is a very fine place! But by the light of this summer day, Jarndyce, if you call upon the owner while you stay with me, you are likely to have but a cool reception. He carries himself like an eight-day clock at all times, like one of a race of eight-day clocks in gorgeous cases that never go and never went—Ha ha ha!—but he will have some extra stiffness, I can promise you, for the friends of his friend and neighbour Boythorn!"

"I shall not put him to the proof," said my guardian. "He is as indifferent

to the honour of knowing me, I dare say, as I am to the honour of knowing him. The air of the grounds and perhaps such a view of the house as any other sightseer might get are quite enough for me."

"Well!" said Mr. Boythorn. "I am glad of it on the whole. It's in better keeping. I am looked upon about here as a second Ajax defying the lightning. Ha ha ha ha! When I go into our little church on a Sunday, a considerable part of the inconsiderable congregation expect to see me drop, scorched and withered, on the pavement under the Dedlock displeasure. Ha ha ha ha! I have no doubt he is surprised that I don't. For he is, by heaven, the most self-satisfied, and the shallowest, and the most coxcombical and utterly brainless ass!"

Our coming to the ridge of a hill we had been ascending enabled our friend to point out Chesney Wold itself to us and diverted his attention from its master.

It was a picturesque old house in a fine park richly wooded. Among the trees and not far from the residence he pointed out the spire of the little church of which he had spoken. Oh, the solemn woods over which the light and shadow travelled swiftly, as if heavenly wings were sweeping on benignant errands through the summer air; the smooth green slopes, the glittering water, the garden where the flowers were so symmetrically arranged in clusters of the richest colours, how beautiful they looked! The house, with gable and chimney, and tower, and turret, and dark doorway, and broad terrace-walk, twining among the balustrades of which, and lying heaped upon the vases, there was one great flush of roses, seemed scarcely real in its light solidity and in the serene and peaceful hush that rested on all around it. To Ada and to me, that above all appeared the pervading influence. On everything, house, garden, terrace, green slopes, water, old oaks, fern, moss, woods again, and far away across the openings in the prospect to the distance lying wide before us with a purple bloom upon it, there seemed to be such undisturbed repose.

When we came into the little village and passed a small inn with the sign of the Dedlock Arms swinging over the road in front, Mr. Boythorn interchanged greetings with a young gentleman sitting on a bench outside the inn-door who had some fishing-tackle lying beside him.

"That's the housekeeper's grandson, Mr. Rouncewell by name," said, he, "and he is in love with a pretty girl up at the house. Lady Dedlock has taken

a fancy to the pretty girl and is going to keep her about her own fair person—an honour which my young friend himself does not at all appreciate. However, he can't marry just yet, even if his Rosebud were willing; so he is fain to make the best of it. In the meanwhile, he comes here pretty often for a day or two at a time to—fish. Ha ha ha ha!"

"Are he and the pretty girl engaged, Mr. Boythorn?" asked Ada.

"Why, my dear Miss Clare," he returned, "I think they may perhaps understand each other; but you will see them soon, I dare say, and I must learn from you on such a point—not you from me."

Ada blushed, and Mr. Boythorn, trotting forward on his comely grey horse, dismounted at his own door and stood ready with extended arm and uncovered head to welcome us when we arrived.

He lived in a pretty house, formerly the parsonage house, with a lawn in front, a bright flower-garden at the side, and a well-stocked orchard and kitchen-garden in the rear, enclosed with a venerable wall that had of itself a ripened ruddy look. But, indeed, everything about the place wore an aspect of maturity and abundance. The old lime-tree walk was like green cloisters, the very shadows of the cherry-trees and apple-trees were heavy with fruit, the gooseberry-bushes were so laden that their branches arched and rested on the earth, the strawberries and raspberries grew in like profusion, and the peaches basked by the hundred on the wall. Tumbled about among the spread nets and the glass frames sparkling and winking in the sun there were such heaps of drooping pods, and marrows, and cucumbers, that every foot of ground appeared a vegetable treasury, while the smell of sweet herbs and all kinds of wholesome growth (to say nothing of the neighbouring meadows where the hay was carrying) made the whole air a great nosegay. Such stillness and composure reigned within the orderly precincts of the old red wall that even the feathers hung in garlands to scare the birds hardly stirred; and the wall had such a ripening influence that where, here and there high up, a disused nail and scrap of list still clung to it, it was easy to fancy that they had mellowed with the changing seasons and that they had rusted and decayed according to the common fate.

The house, though a little disorderly in comparison with the garden, was a real old house with settles in the chimney of the brick-floored kitchen and great beams across the ceilings. On one side of it was the terrible piece of ground in dispute, where Mr. Boythorn maintained a sentry in a smock-

frock day and night, whose duty was supposed to be, in cases of aggression, immediately to ring a large bell hung up there for the purpose, to unchain a great bull-dog established in a kennel as his ally, and generally to deal destruction on the enemy. Not content with these precautions, Mr. Boythorn had himself composed and posted there, on painted boards to which his name was attached in large letters, the following solemn warnings: “Beware of the bull-dog. He is most ferocious. Lawrence Boythorn.” “The blunderbus is loaded with slugs. Lawrence Boythorn.” “Man-traps and spring-guns are set here at all times of the day and night. Lawrence Boythorn.” “Take notice. That any person or persons audaciously presuming to trespass on this property will be punished with the utmost severity of private chastisement and prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law. Lawrence Boythorn.” These he showed us from the drawing-room window, while his bird was hopping about his head, and he laughed, “Ha ha ha ha! Ha ha ha ha!” to that extent as he pointed them out that I really thought he would have hurt himself.

“But this is taking a good deal of trouble,” said Mr. Skimpole in his light way, “when you are not in earnest after all.”

“Not in earnest!” returned Mr. Boythorn with unspeakable warmth. “Not in earnest! If I could have hoped to train him, I would have bought a lion instead of that dog and would have turned him loose upon the first intolerable robber who should dare to make an encroachment on my rights. Let Sir Leicester Dedlock consent to come out and decide this question by single combat, and I will meet him with any weapon known to mankind in any age or country. I am that much in earnest. Not more!”

We arrived at his house on a Saturday. On the Sunday morning we all set forth to walk to the little church in the park. Entering the park, almost immediately by the disputed ground, we pursued a pleasant footpath winding among the verdant turf and the beautiful trees until it brought us to the church-porch.

The congregation was extremely small and quite a rustic one with the exception of a large muster of servants from the house, some of whom were already in their seats, while others were yet dropping in. There were some stately footmen, and there was a perfect picture of an old coachman, who looked as if he were the official representative of all the pomps and vanities that had ever been put into his coach. There was a very pretty show of

young women, and above them, the handsome old face and fine responsible portly figure of the housekeeper towered pre-eminent. The pretty girl of whom Mr. Boythorn had told us was close by her. She was so very pretty that I might have known her by her beauty even if I had not seen how blushingly conscious she was of the eyes of the young fisherman, whom I discovered not far off. One face, and not an agreeable one, though it was handsome, seemed maliciously watchful of this pretty girl, and indeed of every one and everything there. It was a Frenchwoman's.

As the bell was yet ringing and the great people were not yet come, I had leisure to glance over the church, which smelt as earthy as a grave, and to think what a shady, ancient, solemn little church it was. The windows, heavily shaded by trees, admitted a subdued light that made the faces around me pale, and darkened the old brasses in the pavement and the time and damp-worn monuments, and rendered the sunshine in the little porch, where a monotonous ringer was working at the bell, inestimably bright. But a stir in that direction, a gathering of reverential awe in the rustic faces, and a blandly ferocious assumption on the part of Mr. Boythorn of being resolutely unconscious of somebody's existence forewarned me that the great people were come and that the service was going to begin.

"'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight—'"

Shall I ever forget the rapid beating at my heart, occasioned by the look I met as I stood up! Shall I ever forget the manner in which those handsome proud eyes seemed to spring out of their languor and to hold mine! It was only a moment before I cast mine down—released again, if I may say so—on my book; but I knew the beautiful face quite well in that short space of time.

And, very strangely, there was something quickened within me, associated with the lonely days at my godmother's; yes, away even to the days when I had stood on tiptoe to dress myself at my little glass after dressing my doll. And this, although I had never seen this lady's face before in all my life—I was quite sure of it—absolutely certain.

It was easy to know that the ceremonious, gouty, grey-haired gentleman, the only other occupant of the great pew, was Sir Leicester Dedlock, and that the lady was Lady Dedlock. But why her face should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps of old remembrances, and why I should be so fluttered and troubled (for I was still) by having

casually met her eyes, I could not think.

I felt it to be an unmeaning weakness in me and tried to overcome it by attending to the words I heard. Then, very strangely, I seemed to hear them, not in the reader's voice, but in the well-remembered voice of my godmother. This made me think, did Lady Dedlock's face accidentally resemble my godmother's? It might be that it did, a little; but the expression was so different, and the stern decision which had worn into my godmother's face, like weather into rocks, was so completely wanting in the face before me that it could not be that resemblance which had struck me. Neither did I know the loftiness and haughtiness of Lady Dedlock's face, at all, in any one. And yet I—I, little Esther Summerson, the child who lived a life apart and on whose birthday there was no rejoicing—seemed to arise before my own eyes, evoked out of the past by some power in this fashionable lady, whom I not only entertained no fancy that I had ever seen, but whom I perfectly well knew I had never seen until that hour.

It made me tremble so to be thrown into this unaccountable agitation that I was conscious of being distressed even by the observation of the French maid, though I knew she had been looking watchfully here, and there, and everywhere, from the moment of her coming into the church. By degrees, though very slowly, I at last overcame my strange emotion. After a long time, I looked towards Lady Dedlock again. It was while they were preparing to sing, before the sermon. She took no heed of me, and the beating at my heart was gone. Neither did it revive for more than a few moments when she once or twice afterwards glanced at Ada or at me through her glass.

The service being concluded, Sir Leicester gave his arm with much taste and gallantry to Lady Dedlock—though he was obliged to walk by the help of a thick stick—and escorted her out of church to the pony carriage in which they had come. The servants then dispersed, and so did the congregation, whom Sir Leicester had contemplated all along (Mr. Skimpole said to Mr. Boythorn's infinite delight) as if he were a considerable landed proprietor in heaven.

"He believes he is!" said Mr. Boythorn. "He firmly believes it. So did his father, and his grandfather, and his great-grandfather!"

"Do you know," pursued Mr. Skimpole very unexpectedly to Mr. Boythorn, "it's agreeable to me to see a man of that sort."

“IS it!” said Mr. Boythorn.

“Say that he wants to patronize me,” pursued Mr. Skimpole. “Very well! I don’t object.”

“I do,” said Mr. Boythorn with great vigour.

“Do you really?” returned Mr. Skimpole in his easy light vein. “But that’s taking trouble, surely. And why should you take trouble? Here am I, content to receive things childishly as they fall out, and I never take trouble! I come down here, for instance, and I find a mighty potentate exacting homage. Very well! I say ‘Mighty potentate, here IS my homage! It’s easier to give it than to withhold it. Here it is. If you have anything of an agreeable nature to show me, I shall be happy to see it; if you have anything of an agreeable nature to give me, I shall be happy to accept it.’ Mighty potentate replies in effect, ‘This is a sensible fellow. I find him accord with my digestion and my bilious system. He doesn’t impose upon me the necessity of rolling myself up like a hedgehog with my points outward. I expand, I open, I turn my silver lining outward like Milton’s cloud, and it’s more agreeable to both of us.’ That’s my view of such things, speaking as a child!”

“But suppose you went down somewhere else to-morrow,” said Mr. Boythorn, “where there was the opposite of that fellow—or of this fellow. How then?”

“How then?” said Mr. Skimpole with an appearance of the utmost simplicity and candour. “Just the same then! I should say, ‘My esteemed Boythorn’—to make you the personification of our imaginary friend—‘my esteemed Boythorn, you object to the mighty potentate? Very good. So do I. I take it that my business in the social system is to be agreeable; I take it that everybody’s business in the social system is to be agreeable. It’s a system of harmony, in short. Therefore if you object, I object. Now, excellent Boythorn, let us go to dinner!’”

“But excellent Boythorn might say,” returned our host, swelling and growing very red, “I’ll be—”

“I understand,” said Mr. Skimpole. “Very likely he would.”

“—if I WILL go to dinner!” cried Mr. Boythorn in a violent burst and stopping to strike his stick upon the ground. “And he would probably add, ‘Is there such a thing as principle, Mr. Harold Skimpole?’”

“To which Harold Skimpole would reply, you know,” he returned in his

gayest manner and with his most ingenuous smile, "'Upon my life I have not the least idea! I don't know what it is you call by that name, or where it is, or who possesses it. If you possess it and find it comfortable, I am quite delighted and congratulate you heartily. But I know nothing about it, I assure you; for I am a mere child, and I lay no claim to it, and I don't want it!' So, you see, excellent Boythorn and I would go to dinner after all!"

This was one of many little dialogues between them which I always expected to end, and which I dare say would have ended under other circumstances, in some violent explosion on the part of our host. But he had so high a sense of his hospitable and responsible position as our entertainer, and my guardian laughed so sincerely at and with Mr. Skimpole, as a child who blew bubbles and broke them all day long, that matters never went beyond this point. Mr. Skimpole, who always seemed quite unconscious of having been on delicate ground, then betook himself to beginning some sketch in the park which he never finished, or to playing fragments of airs on the piano, or to singing scraps of songs, or to lying down on his back under a tree and looking at the sky—which he couldn't help thinking, he said, was what he was meant for; it suited him so exactly.

"Enterprise and effort," he would say to us (on his back), "are delightful to me. I believe I am truly cosmopolitan. I have the deepest sympathy with them. I lie in a shady place like this and think of adventurous spirits going to the North Pole or penetrating to the heart of the Torrid Zone with admiration. Mercenary creatures ask, 'What is the use of a man's going to the North Pole? What good does it do?' I can't say; but, for anything I CAN say, he may go for the purpose—though he don't know it—of employing my thoughts as I lie here. Take an extreme case. Take the case of the slaves on American plantations. I dare say they are worked hard, I dare say they don't altogether like it. I dare say theirs is an unpleasant experience on the whole; but they people the landscape for me, they give it a poetry for me, and perhaps that is one of the pleasanter objects of their existence. I am very sensible of it, if it be, and I shouldn't wonder if it were!"

I always wondered on these occasions whether he ever thought of Mrs. Skimpole and the children, and in what point of view they presented themselves to his cosmopolitan mind. So far as I could understand, they rarely presented themselves at all.

The week had gone round to the Saturday following that beating of my

heart in the church; and every day had been so bright and blue that to ramble in the woods, and to see the light striking down among the transparent leaves and sparkling in the beautiful interlacings of the shadows of the trees, while the birds poured out their songs and the air was drowsy with the hum of insects, had been most delightful. We had one favourite spot, deep in moss and last year's leaves, where there were some felled trees from which the bark was all stripped off. Seated among these, we looked through a green vista supported by thousands of natural columns, the whitened stems of trees, upon a distant prospect made so radiant by its contrast with the shade in which we sat and made so precious by the arched perspective through which we saw it that it was like a glimpse of the better land. Upon the Saturday we sat here, Mr. Jarndyce, Ada, and I, until we heard thunder muttering in the distance and felt the large raindrops rattle through the leaves.

The weather had been all the week extremely sultry, but the storm broke so suddenly—upon us, at least, in that sheltered spot—that before we reached the outskirts of the wood the thunder and lightning were frequent and the rain came plunging through the leaves as if every drop were a great leaden bead. As it was not a time for standing among trees, we ran out of the wood, and up and down the moss-grown steps which crossed the plantation-fence like two broad-staved ladders placed back to back, and made for a keeper's lodge which was close at hand. We had often noticed the dark beauty of this lodge standing in a deep twilight of trees, and how the ivy clustered over it, and how there was a steep hollow near, where we had once seen the keeper's dog dive down into the fern as if it were water.

The lodge was so dark within, now the sky was overcast, that we only clearly saw the man who came to the door when we took shelter there and put two chairs for Ada and me. The lattice-windows were all thrown open, and we sat just within the doorway watching the storm. It was grand to see how the wind awoke, and bent the trees, and drove the rain before it like a cloud of smoke; and to hear the solemn thunder and to see the lightning; and while thinking with awe of the tremendous powers by which our little lives are encompassed, to consider how beneficent they are and how upon the smallest flower and leaf there was already a freshness poured from all this seeming rage which seemed to make creation new again.

"Is it not dangerous to sit in so exposed a place?"

“Oh, no, Esther dear!” said Ada quietly.

Ada said it to me, but I had not spoken.

The beating of my heart came back again. I had never heard the voice, as I had never seen the face, but it affected me in the same strange way. Again, in a moment, there arose before my mind innumerable pictures of myself.

Lady Dedlock had taken shelter in the lodge before our arrival there and had come out of the gloom within. She stood behind my chair with her hand upon it. I saw her with her hand close to my shoulder when I turned my head.

“I have frightened you?” she said.

No. It was not fright. Why should I be frightened!

“I believe,” said Lady Dedlock to my guardian, “I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Jarndyce.”

“Your remembrance does me more honour than I had supposed it would, Lady Dedlock,” he returned.

“I recognized you in church on Sunday. I am sorry that any local disputes of Sir Leicester’s—they are not of his seeking, however, I believe—should render it a matter of some absurd difficulty to show you any attention here.”

“I am aware of the circumstances,” returned my guardian with a smile, “and am sufficiently obliged.”

She had given him her hand in an indifferent way that seemed habitual to her and spoke in a correspondingly indifferent manner, though in a very pleasant voice. She was as graceful as she was beautiful, perfectly self-possessed, and had the air, I thought, of being able to attract and interest any one if she had thought it worth her while. The keeper had brought her a chair on which she sat in the middle of the porch between us.

“Is the young gentleman disposed of whom you wrote to Sir Leicester about and whose wishes Sir Leicester was sorry not to have it in his power to advance in any way?” she said over her shoulder to my guardian.

“I hope so,” said he.

She seemed to respect him and even to wish to conciliate him. There was something very winning in her haughty manner, and it became more familiar—I was going to say more easy, but that could hardly be—as she spoke to him over her shoulder.

“I presume this is your other ward, Miss Clare?”

He presented Ada, in form.

“You will lose the disinterested part of your Don Quixote character,” said Lady Dedlock to Mr. Jarndyce over her shoulder again, “if you only redress the wrongs of beauty like this. But present me,” and she turned full upon me, “to this young lady too!”

“Miss Summerson really is my ward,” said Mr. Jarndyce. “I am responsible to no Lord Chancellor in her case.”

“Has Miss Summerson lost both her parents?” said my Lady.

“Yes.”

“She is very fortunate in her guardian.”

Lady Dedlock looked at me, and I looked at her and said I was indeed. All at once she turned from me with a hasty air, almost expressive of displeasure or dislike, and spoke to him over her shoulder again.

“Ages have passed since we were in the habit of meeting, Mr. Jarndyce.”

“A long time. At least I thought it was a long time, until I saw you last Sunday,” he returned.

“What! Even you are a courtier, or think it necessary to become one to me!” she said with some disdain. “I have achieved that reputation, I suppose.”

“You have achieved so much, Lady Dedlock,” said my guardian, “that you pay some little penalty, I dare say. But none to me.”

“So much!” she repeated, slightly laughing. “Yes!”

With her air of superiority, and power, and fascination, and I know not what, she seemed to regard Ada and me as little more than children. So, as she slightly laughed and afterwards sat looking at the rain, she was as self-possessed and as free to occupy herself with her own thoughts as if she had been alone.

“I think you knew my sister when we were abroad together better than you know me?” she said, looking at him again.

“Yes, we happened to meet oftener,” he returned.

“We went our several ways,” said Lady Dedlock, “and had little in common even before we agreed to differ. It is to be regretted, I suppose, but it could not be helped.”

Lady Dedlock again sat looking at the rain. The storm soon began to pass upon its way. The shower greatly abated, the lightning ceased, the thunder rolled among the distant hills, and the sun began to glisten on the

wet leaves and the falling rain. As we sat there, silently, we saw a little pony phaeton coming towards us at a merry pace.

"The messenger is coming back, my Lady," said the keeper, "with the carriage."

As it drove up, we saw that there were two people inside. There alighted from it, with some cloaks and wrappers, first the Frenchwoman whom I had seen in church, and secondly the pretty girl, the Frenchwoman with a defiant confidence, the pretty girl confused and hesitating.

"What now?" said Lady Dedlock. "Two!"

"I am your maid, my Lady, at the present," said the Frenchwoman. "The message was for the attendant."

"I was afraid you might mean me, my Lady," said the pretty girl.

"I did mean you, child," replied her mistress calmly. "Put that shawl on me."

She slightly stooped her shoulders to receive it, and the pretty girl lightly dropped it in its place. The Frenchwoman stood unnoticed, looking on with her lips very tightly set.

"I am sorry," said Lady Dedlock to Mr. Jarndyce, "that we are not likely to renew our former acquaintance. You will allow me to send the carriage back for your two wards. It shall be here directly."

But as he would on no account accept this offer, she took a graceful leave of Ada—none of me—and put her hand upon his proffered arm, and got into the carriage, which was a little, low, park carriage with a hood.

"Come in, child," she said to the pretty girl; "I shall want you. Go on!"

The carriage rolled away, and the Frenchwoman, with the wrappers she had brought hanging over her arm, remained standing where she had alighted.

I suppose there is nothing pride can so little bear with as pride itself, and that she was punished for her imperious manner. Her retaliation was the most singular I could have imagined. She remained perfectly still until the carriage had turned into the drive, and then, without the least discomposure of countenance, slipped off her shoes, left them on the ground, and walked deliberately in the same direction through the wettest of the wet grass.

"Is that young woman mad?" said my guardian.

"Oh, no, sir!" said the keeper, who, with his wife, was looking after her. "Hortense is not one of that sort. She has as good a head-piece as the best.

But she’s mortal high and passionate—powerful high and passionate; and what with having notice to leave, and having others put above her, she don’t take kindly to it.”

“But why should she walk shoeless through all that water?” said my guardian.

“Why, indeed, sir, unless it is to cool her down!” said the man.

“Or unless she fancies it’s blood,” said the woman. “She’d as soon walk through that as anything else, I think, when her own’s up!”

We passed not far from the house a few minutes afterwards. Peaceful as it had looked when we first saw it, it looked even more so now, with a diamond spray glittering all about it, a light wind blowing, the birds no longer hushed but singing strongly, everything refreshed by the late rain, and the little carriage shining at the doorway like a fairy carriage made of silver. Still, very steadfastly and quietly walking towards it, a peaceful figure too in the landscape, went Mademoiselle Hortense, shoeless, through the wet grass.

CHAPTER XIX

Moving On

IT IS THE LONG vacation in the regions of Chancery Lane. The good ships Law and Equity, those teak-built, copper-bottomed, iron-fastened, brazen-faced, and not by any means fast-sailing clippers are laid up in ordinary. The Flying Dutchman, with a crew of ghostly clients imploring all whom they may encounter to peruse their papers, has drifted, for the time being, heaven knows where. The courts are all shut up; the public offices lie in a hot sleep. Westminster Hall itself is a shady solitude where nightingales might sing, and a tenderer class of suitors than is usually found there, walk.

The Temple, Chancery Lane, Serjeants' Inn, and Lincoln's Inn even unto the Fields are like tidal harbours at low water, where stranded proceedings, offices at anchor, idle clerks lounging on lop-sided stools that will not recover their perpendicular until the current of Term sets in, lie high and dry upon the ooze of the long vacation. Outer doors of chambers are shut up by the score, messages and parcels are to be left at the Porter's Lodge by the bushel. A crop of grass would grow in the chinks of the stone pavement outside Lincoln's Inn Hall, but that the ticket-porters, who have nothing to do beyond sitting in the shade there, with their white aprons over their heads to keep the flies off, grub it up and eat it thoughtfully.

There is only one judge in town. Even he only comes twice a week to sit in chambers. If the country folks of those assize towns on his circuit could see him now! No full-bottomed wig, no red petticoats, no fur, no javelin-men, no white wands. Merely a close-shaved gentleman in white trousers and a white hat, with sea-bronze on the judicial countenance, and a strip of bark peeled by the solar rays from the judicial nose, who calls in at the shell-fish shop as he comes along and drinks iced ginger-beer!

The bar of England is scattered over the face of the earth. How England can get on through four long summer months without its bar—which is its acknowledged refuge in adversity and its only legitimate triumph in prosperity—is beside the question; assuredly that shield and buckler of

Britannia are not in present wear. The learned gentleman who is always so tremendously indignant at the unprecedented outrage committed on the feelings of his client by the opposite party that he never seems likely to recover it is doing infinitely better than might be expected in Switzerland. The learned gentleman who does the withering business and who blights all opponents with his gloomy sarcasm is as merry as a grig at a French watering-place. The learned gentleman who weeps by the pint on the smallest provocation has not shed a tear these six weeks. The very learned gentleman who has cooled the natural heat of his gingery complexion in pools and fountains of law until he has become great in knotty arguments for term-time, when he poses the drowsy bench with legal “chaff,” inexplicable to the uninitiated and to most of the initiated too, is roaming, with a characteristic delight in aridity and dust, about Constantinople. Other dispersed fragments of the same great palladium are to be found on the canals of Venice, at the second cataract of the Nile, in the baths of Germany, and sprinkled on the sea-sand all over the English coast. Scarcely one is to be encountered in the deserted region of Chancery Lane. If such a lonely member of the bar do flit across the waste and come upon a prowling suitor who is unable to leave off haunting the scenes of his anxiety, they frighten one another and retreat into opposite shades.

It is the hottest long vacation known for many years. All the young clerks are madly in love, and according to their various degrees, pine for bliss with the beloved object, at Margate, Ramsgate, or Gravesend. All the middle-aged clerks think their families too large. All the unowned dogs who stray into the Inns of Court and pant about staircases and other dry places seeking water give short howls of aggravation. All the blind men’s dogs in the streets draw their masters against pumps or trip them over buckets. A shop with a sun-blind, and a watered pavement, and a bowl of gold and silver fish in the window, is a sanctuary. Temple Bar gets so hot that it is, to the adjacent Strand and Fleet Street, what a heater is in an urn, and keeps them simmering all night.

There are offices about the Inns of Court in which a man might be cool, if any coolness were worth purchasing at such a price in dullness; but the little thoroughfares immediately outside those retirements seem to blaze. In Mr. Krook’s court, it is so hot that the people turn their houses inside out and sit in chairs upon the pavement—Mr. Krook included, who there

pursues his studies, with his cat (who never is too hot) by his side. The Sol's Arms has discontinued the Harmonic Meetings for the season, and Little Swills is engaged at the Pastoral Gardens down the river, where he comes out in quite an innocent manner and sings comic ditties of a juvenile complexion calculated (as the bill says) not to wound the feelings of the most fastidious mind.

Over all the legal neighbourhood there hangs, like some great veil of rust or gigantic cobweb, the idleness and pensiveness of the long vacation. Mr. Snagsby, law-stationer of Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, is sensible of the influence not only in his mind as a sympathetic and contemplative man, but also in his business as a law-stationer aforesaid. He has more leisure for musing in Staple Inn and in the Rolls Yard during the long vacation than at other seasons, and he says to the two 'prentices, what a thing it is in such hot weather to think that you live in an island with the sea a-rolling and a-bowling right round you.

Guster is busy in the little drawing-room on this present afternoon in the long vacation, when Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby have it in contemplation to receive company. The expected guests are rather select than numerous, being Mr. and Mrs. Chadband and no more. From Mr. Chadband's being much given to describe himself, both verbally and in writing, as a vessel, he is occasionally mistaken by strangers for a gentleman connected with navigation, but he is, as he expresses it, "in the ministry." Mr. Chadband is attached to no particular denomination and is considered by his persecutors to have nothing so very remarkable to say on the greatest of subjects as to render his volunteering, on his own account, at all incumbent on his conscience; but he has his followers, and Mrs. Snagsby is of the number. Mrs. Snagsby has but recently taken a passage upward by the vessel, Chadband; and her attention was attracted to that Bark A 1, when she was something flushed by the hot weather.

"My little woman," says Mr. Snagsby to the sparrows in Staple Inn, "likes to have her religion rather sharp, you see!"

So Guster, much impressed by regarding herself for the time as the handmaid of Chadband, whom she knows to be endowed with the gift of holding forth for four hours at a stretch, prepares the little drawing-room for tea. All the furniture is shaken and dusted, the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby are touched up with a wet cloth, the best tea-service is set forth,

and there is excellent provision made of dainty new bread, crusty twists, cool fresh butter, thin slices of ham, tongue, and German sausage, and delicate little rows of anchovies nestling in parsley, not to mention new-laid eggs, to be brought up warm in a napkin, and hot buttered toast. For Chadband is rather a consuming vessel—the persecutors say a gorging vessel—and can wield such weapons of the flesh as a knife and fork remarkably well.

Mr. Snagsby in his best coat, looking at all the preparations when they are completed and coughing his cough of deference behind his hand, says to Mrs. Snagsby, “At what time did you expect Mr. and Mrs. Chadband, my love?”

“At six,” says Mrs. Snagsby.

Mr. Snagsby observes in a mild and casual way that “it’s gone that.”

“Perhaps you’d like to begin without them,” is Mrs. Snagsby’s reproachful remark.

Mr. Snagsby does look as if he would like it very much, but he says, with his cough of mildness, “No, my dear, no. I merely named the time.”

“What’s time,” says Mrs. Snagsby, “to eternity?”

“Very true, my dear,” says Mr. Snagsby. “Only when a person lays in victuals for tea, a person does it with a view—perhaps—more to time. And when a time is named for having tea, it’s better to come up to it.”

“To come up to it!” Mrs. Snagsby repeats with severity. “Up to it! As if Mr. Chadband was a fighter!”

“Not at all, my dear,” says Mr. Snagsby.

Here, Guster, who had been looking out of the bedroom window, comes rustling and scratching down the little staircase like a popular ghost, and falling flushed into the drawing-room, announces that Mr. and Mrs. Chadband have appeared in the court. The bell at the inner door in the passage immediately thereafter tinkling, she is admonished by Mrs. Snagsby, on pain of instant reconsignment to her patron saint, not to omit the ceremony of announcement. Much discomposed in her nerves (which were previously in the best order) by this threat, she so fearfully mutilates that point of state as to announce “Mr. and Mrs. Cheeseming, least which, Imeantersay, whatsername!” and retires conscience-stricken from the presence.

Mr. Chadband is a large yellow man with a fat smile and a general

appearance of having a good deal of train oil in his system. Mrs. Chadband is a stern, severe-looking, silent woman. Mr. Chadband moves softly and cumbrously, not unlike a bear who has been taught to walk upright. He is very much embarrassed about the arms, as if they were inconvenient to him and he wanted to grovel, is very much in a perspiration about the head, and never speaks without first putting up his great hand, as delivering a token to his hearers that he is going to edify them.

"My friends," says Mr. Chadband, "peace be on this house! On the master thereof, on the mistress thereof, on the young maidens, and on the young men! My friends, why do I wish for peace? What is peace? Is it war? No. Is it strife? No. Is it lovely, and gentle, and beautiful, and pleasant, and serene, and joyful? Oh, yes! Therefore, my friends, I wish for peace, upon you and upon yours."

In consequence of Mrs. Snagsby looking deeply edified, Mr. Snagsby thinks it expedient on the whole to say amen, which is well received.

"Now, my friends," proceeds Mr. Chadband, "since I am upon this theme —"

Guster presents herself. Mrs. Snagsby, in a spectral bass voice and without removing her eyes from Chadband, says with dreadful distinctness, "Go away!"

"Now, my friends," says Chadband, "since I am upon this theme, and in my lowly path improving it—"

Guster is heard unaccountably to murmur "one thousing seven hundred and eighty-two." The spectral voice repeats more solemnly, "Go away!"

"Now, my friends," says Mr. Chadband, "we will inquire in a spirit of love—"

Still Guster reiterates "one thousing seven hundred and eighty-two."

Mr. Chadband, pausing with the resignation of a man accustomed to be persecuted and languidly folding up his chin into his fat smile, says, "Let us hear the maiden! Speak, maiden!"

"One thousing seven hundred and eighty-two, if you please, sir. Which he wish to know what the shilling ware for," says Guster, breathless.

"For?" returns Mrs. Chadband. "For his fare!"

Guster replied that "he insistes on one and eightpence or on summonsizzing the party." Mrs. Snagsby and Mrs. Chadband are proceeding to grow shrill in indignation when Mr. Chadband quiets the

tumult by lifting up his hand.

“My friends,” says he, “I remember a duty unfulfilled yesterday. It is right that I should be chastened in some penalty. I ought not to murmur. Rachael, pay the eightpence!”

While Mrs. Snagsby, drawing her breath, looks hard at Mr. Snagsby, as who should say, “You hear this apostle!” and while Mr. Chadband glows with humility and train oil, Mrs. Chadband pays the money. It is Mr. Chadband’s habit—it is the head and front of his pretensions indeed—to keep this sort of debtor and creditor account in the smallest items and to post it publicly on the most trivial occasions.

“My friends,” says Chadband, “eightpence is not much; it might justly have been one and fourpence; it might justly have been half a crown. O let us be joyful, joyful! O let us be joyful!”

With which remark, which appears from its sound to be an extract in verse, Mr. Chadband stalks to the table, and before taking a chair, lifts up his admonitory hand.

“My friends,” says he, “what is this which we now behold as being spread before us? Refreshment. Do we need refreshment then, my friends? We do. And why do we need refreshment, my friends? Because we are but mortal, because we are but sinful, because we are but of the earth, because we are not of the air. Can we fly, my friends? We cannot. Why can we not fly, my friends?”

Mr. Snagsby, presuming on the success of his last point, ventures to observe in a cheerful and rather knowing tone, “No wings.” But is immediately frowned down by Mrs. Snagsby.

“I say, my friends,” pursues Mr. Chadband, utterly rejecting and obliterating Mr. Snagsby’s suggestion, “why can we not fly? Is it because we are calculated to walk? It is. Could we walk, my friends, without strength? We could not. What should we do without strength, my friends? Our legs would refuse to bear us, our knees would double up, our ankles would turn over, and we should come to the ground. Then from whence, my friends, in a human point of view, do we derive the strength that is necessary to our limbs? Is it,” says Chadband, glancing over the table, “from bread in various forms, from butter which is churned from the milk which is yielded unto us by the cow, from the eggs which are laid by the fowl, from ham, from tongue, from sausage, and from such like? It is. Then

let us partake of the good things which are set before us!”

The persecutors denied that there was any particular gift in Mr. Chadband’s piling verbose flights of stairs, one upon another, after this fashion. But this can only be received as a proof of their determination to persecute, since it must be within everybody’s experience that the Chadband style of oratory is widely received and much admired.

Mr. Chadband, however, having concluded for the present, sits down at Mr. Snagsby’s table and lays about him prodigiously. The conversion of nutriment of any sort into oil of the quality already mentioned appears to be a process so inseparable from the constitution of this exemplary vessel that in beginning to eat and drink, he may be described as always becoming a kind of considerable oil mills or other large factory for the production of that article on a wholesale scale. On the present evening of the long vacation, in Cook’s Court, Cursitor Street, he does such a powerful stroke of business that the warehouse appears to be quite full when the works cease.

At this period of the entertainment, Guster, who has never recovered her first failure, but has neglected no possible or impossible means of bringing the establishment and herself into contempt—among which may be briefly enumerated her unexpectedly performing clashing military music on Mr. Chadband’s head with plates, and afterwards crowning that gentleman with muffins—at which period of the entertainment, Guster whispers Mr. Snagsby that he is wanted.

“And being wanted in the—not to put too fine a point upon it—in the shop,” says Mr. Snagsby, rising, “perhaps this good company will excuse me for half a minute.”

Mr. Snagsby descends and finds the two ’prentices intently contemplating a police constable, who holds a ragged boy by the arm.

“Why, bless my heart,” says Mr. Snagsby, “what’s the matter!”

“This boy,” says the constable, “although he’s repeatedly told to, won’t move on—”

“I’m always a-moving on, sar,” cries the boy, wiping away his grimy tears with his arm. “I’ve always been a-moving and a-moving on, ever since I was born. Where can I possibly move to, sir, more nor I do move!”

“He won’t move on,” says the constable calmly, with a slight professional hitch of his neck involving its better settlement in his stiff

stock, “although he has been repeatedly cautioned, and therefore I am obliged to take him into custody. He’s as obstinate a young gonoph as I know. He WON’T move on.”

“Oh, my eye! Where can I move to!” cries the boy, clutching quite desperately at his hair and beating his bare feet upon the floor of Mr. Snagsby’s passage.

“Don’t you come none of that or I shall make blessed short work of you!” says the constable, giving him a passionless shake. “My instructions are that you are to move on. I have told you so five hundred times.”

“But where?” cries the boy.

“Well! Really, constable, you know,” says Mr. Snagsby wistfully, and coughing behind his hand his cough of great perplexity and doubt, “really, that does seem a question. Where, you know?”

“My instructions don’t go to that,” replies the constable. “My instructions are that this boy is to move on.”

Do you hear, Jo? It is nothing to you or to any one else that the great lights of the parliamentary sky have failed for some few years in this business to set you the example of moving on. The one grand recipe remains for you—the profound philosophical prescription—the be-all and the end-all of your strange existence upon earth. Move on! You are by no means to move off, Jo, for the great lights can’t at all agree about that. Move on!

Mr. Snagsby says nothing to this effect, says nothing at all indeed, but coughs his forlornest cough, expressive of no thoroughfare in any direction. By this time Mr. and Mrs. Chadband and Mrs. Snagsby, hearing the altercation, have appeared upon the stairs. Guster having never left the end of the passage, the whole household are assembled.

“The simple question is, sir,” says the constable, “whether you know this boy. He says you do.”

Mrs. Snagsby, from her elevation, instantly cries out, “No he don’t!”

“My lit-tle woman!” says Mr. Snagsby, looking up the staircase. “My love, permit me! Pray have a moment’s patience, my dear. I do know something of this lad, and in what I know of him, I can’t say that there’s any harm; perhaps on the contrary, constable.” To whom the law-stationer relates his Joful and woeful experience, suppressing the half-crown fact.

“Well!” says the constable, “so far, it seems, he had grounds for what he

said. When I took him into custody up in Holborn, he said you knew him. Upon that, a young man who was in the crowd said he was acquainted with you, and you were a respectable housekeeper, and if I'd call and make the inquiry, he'd appear. The young man don't seem inclined to keep his word, but—Oh! Here IS the young man!"

Enter Mr. Guppy, who nods to Mr. Snagsby and touches his hat with the chivalry of clerkship to the ladies on the stairs.

"I was strolling away from the office just now when I found this row going on," says Mr. Guppy to the law-stationer, "and as your name was mentioned, I thought it was right the thing should be looked into."

"It was very good-natured of you, sir," says Mr. Snagsby, "and I am obliged to you." And Mr. Snagsby again relates his experience, again suppressing the half-crown fact.

"Now, I know where you live," says the constable, then, to Jo. "You live down in Tom-all-Alone's. That's a nice innocent place to live in, ain't it?"

"I can't go and live in no nicer place, sir," replies Jo. "They wouldn't have nothink to say to me if I wos to go to a nice innocent place fur to live. Who ud go and let a nice innocent lodging to such a reg'lar one as me!"

"You are very poor, ain't you?" says the constable.

"Yes, I am indeed, sir, wery poor in gin'ral," replies Jo. "I leave you to judge now! I shook these two half-crowns out of him," says the constable, producing them to the company, "in only putting my hand upon him!"

"They're wot's left, Mr. Snagsby," says Jo, "out of a sov-ring as wos give me by a lady in a wale as sed she wos a servant and as come to my crossin one night and asked to be showd this 'ere ouse and the ouse wot him as you giv the writin to died at, and the berrin-ground wot he's berrid in. She ses to me she ses 'are you the boy at the inkwhich?' she ses. I ses 'yes' I ses. She ses to me she ses 'can you show me all them places?' I ses 'yes I can' I ses. And she ses to me 'do it' and I dun it and she giv me a sov'ring and hooked it. And I an't had much of the sov'ring neither," says Jo, with dirty tears, "fur I had to pay five bob, down in Tom-all-Alone's, afore they'd square it fur to give me change, and then a young man he thieved another five while I was asleep and another boy he thieved ninepence and the landlord he stood drains round with a lot more on it."

"You don't expect anybody to believe this, about the lady and the sovereign, do you?" says the constable, eyeing him aside with ineffable

disdain.

“I don’t know as I do, sir,” replies Jo. “I don’t expect nothink at all, sir, much, but that’s the true hist’ry on it.”

“You see what he is!” the constable observes to the audience. “Well, Mr. Snagsby, if I don’t lock him up this time, will you engage for his moving on?”

“No!” cries Mrs. Snagsby from the stairs.

“My little woman!” pleads her husband. “Constable, I have no doubt he’ll move on. You know you really must do it,” says Mr. Snagsby.

“I’m everyways agreeable, sir,” says the hapless Jo.

“Do it, then,” observes the constable. “You know what you have got to do. Do it! And recollect you won’t get off so easy next time. Catch hold of your money. Now, the sooner you’re five mile off, the better for all parties.”

With this farewell hint and pointing generally to the setting sun as a likely place to move on to, the constable bids his auditors good afternoon and makes the echoes of Cook’s Court perform slow music for him as he walks away on the shady side, carrying his iron-bound hat in his hand for a little ventilation.

Now, Jo’s improbable story concerning the lady and the sovereign has awakened more or less the curiosity of all the company. Mr. Guppy, who has an inquiring mind in matters of evidence and who has been suffering severely from the lassitude of the long vacation, takes that interest in the case that he enters on a regular cross-examination of the witness, which is found so interesting by the ladies that Mrs. Snagsby politely invites him to step upstairs and drink a cup of tea, if he will excuse the disarranged state of the tea-table, consequent on their previous exertions. Mr. Guppy yielding his assent to this proposal, Jo is requested to follow into the drawing-room doorway, where Mr. Guppy takes him in hand as a witness, patting him into this shape, that shape, and the other shape like a butterman dealing with so much butter, and worrying him according to the best models. Nor is the examination unlike many such model displays, both in respect of its eliciting nothing and of its being lengthy, for Mr. Guppy is sensible of his talent, and Mrs. Snagsby feels not only that it gratifies her inquisitive disposition, but that it lifts her husband’s establishment higher up in the law. During the progress of this keen encounter, the vessel Chadband, being merely engaged in the oil trade, gets aground and waits to be floated off.

“Well!” says Mr. Guppy. “Either this boy sticks to it like cobbler’s-wax or there is something out of the common here that beats anything that ever came into my way at Kenge and Carboy’s.”

Mrs. Chadband whispers Mrs. Snagsby, who exclaims, “You don’t say so!”

“For years!” replied Mrs. Chadband.

“Has known Kenge and Carboy’s office for years,” Mrs. Snagsby triumphantly explains to Mr. Guppy. “Mrs. Chadband—this gentleman’s wife—Reverend Mr. Chadband.”

“Oh, indeed!” says Mr. Guppy.

“Before I married my present husband,” says Mrs. Chadband.

“Was you a party in anything, ma’am?” says Mr. Guppy, transferring his cross-examination.

“No.”

“NOT a party in anything, ma’am?” says Mr. Guppy.

Mrs. Chadband shakes her head.

“Perhaps you were acquainted with somebody who was a party in something, ma’am?” says Mr. Guppy, who likes nothing better than to model his conversation on forensic principles.

“Not exactly that, either,” replies Mrs. Chadband, humouring the joke with a hard-favoured smile.

“Not exactly that, either!” repeats Mr. Guppy. “Very good. Pray, ma’am, was it a lady of your acquaintance who had some transactions (we will not at present say what transactions) with Kenge and Carboy’s office, or was it a gentleman of your acquaintance? Take time, ma’am. We shall come to it presently. Man or woman, ma’am?”

“Neither,” says Mrs. Chadband as before.

“Oh! A child!” says Mr. Guppy, throwing on the admiring Mrs. Snagsby the regular acute professional eye which is thrown on British jurymen. “Now, ma’am, perhaps you’ll have the kindness to tell us WHAT child.”

“You have got it at last, sir,” says Mrs. Chadband with another hard-favoured smile. “Well, sir, it was before your time, most likely, judging from your appearance. I was left in charge of a child named Esther Summerson, who was put out in life by Messrs. Kenge and Carboy.”

“Miss Summerson, ma’am!” cries Mr. Guppy, excited.

“I call her Esther Summerson,” says Mrs. Chadband with austerity.

“There was no Miss-ing of the girl in my time. It was Esther. ‘Esther, do this! Esther, do that!’ and she was made to do it.”

“My dear ma’am,” returns Mr. Guppy, moving across the small apartment, “the humble individual who now addresses you received that young lady in London when she first came here from the establishment to which you have alluded. Allow me to have the pleasure of taking you by the hand.”

Mr. Chadband, at last seeing his opportunity, makes his accustomed signal and rises with a smoking head, which he dabs with his pocket-handkerchief. Mrs. Snagsby whispers “Hush!”

“My friends,” says Chadband, “we have partaken in moderation” (which was certainly not the case so far as he was concerned) “of the comforts which have been provided for us. May this house live upon the fatness of the land; may corn and wine be plentiful therein; may it grow, may it thrive, may it prosper, may it advance, may it proceed, may it press forward! But, my friends, have we partaken of anything else? We have. My friends, of what else have we partaken? Of spiritual profit? Yes. From whence have we derived that spiritual profit? My young friend, stand forth!”

Jo, thus apostrophized, gives a slouch backward, and another slouch forward, and another slouch to each side, and confronts the eloquent Chadband with evident doubts of his intentions.

“My young friend,” says Chadband, “you are to us a pearl, you are to us a diamond, you are to us a gem, you are to us a jewel. And why, my young friend?”

“I don’t know,” replies Jo. “I don’t know nothink.”

“My young friend,” says Chadband, “it is because you know nothing that you are to us a gem and jewel. For what are you, my young friend? Are you a beast of the field? No. A bird of the air? No. A fish of the sea or river? No. You are a human boy, my young friend. A human boy. O glorious to be a human boy! And why glorious, my young friend? Because you are capable of receiving the lessons of wisdom, because you are capable of profiting by this discourse which I now deliver for your good, because you are not a stick, or a staff, or a stock, or a stone, or a post, or a pillar.

O running stream of sparkling joy
To be a soaring human boy!

And do you cool yourself in that stream now, my young friend? No. Why do you not cool yourself in that stream now? Because you are in a state of darkness, because you are in a state of obscurity, because you are in a state of sinfulness, because you are in a state of bondage. My young friend, what is bondage? Let us, in a spirit of love, inquire."

At this threatening stage of the discourse, Jo, who seems to have been gradually going out of his mind, smears his right arm over his face and gives a terrible yawn. Mrs. Snagsby indignantly expresses her belief that he is a limb of the arch-fiend.

"My friends," says Mr. Chadband with his persecuted chin folding itself into its fat smile again as he looks round, "it is right that I should be humbled, it is right that I should be tried, it is right that I should be mortified, it is right that I should be corrected. I stumbled, on Sabbath last, when I thought with pride of my three hours' improving. The account is now favourably balanced: my creditor has accepted a composition. O let us be joyful, joyful! O let us be joyful!"

Great sensation on the part of Mrs. Snagsby.

"My friends," says Chadband, looking round him in conclusion, "I will not proceed with my young friend now. Will you come to-morrow, my young friend, and inquire of this good lady where I am to be found to deliver a discourse unto you, and will you come like the thirsty swallow upon the next day, and upon the day after that, and upon the day after that, and upon many pleasant days, to hear discourses?" (This with a cow-like lightness.)

Jo, whose immediate object seems to be to get away on any terms, gives a shuffling nod. Mr. Guppy then throws him a penny, and Mrs. Snagsby calls to Guster to see him safely out of the house. But before he goes downstairs, Mr. Snagsby loads him with some broken meats from the table, which he carries away, hugging in his arms.

So, Mr. Chadband—of whom the persecutors say that it is no wonder he should go on for any length of time uttering such abominable nonsense, but that the wonder rather is that he should ever leave off, having once the audacity to begin—retires into private life until he invests a little capital of supper in the oil-trade. Jo moves on, through the long vacation, down to Blackfriars Bridge, where he finds a baking stony corner wherein to settle to his repast.

And there he sits, munching and gnawing, and looking up at the great cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral, glittering above a red-and-violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city—so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach. There he sits, the sun going down, the river running fast, the crowd flowing by him in two streams—everything moving on to some purpose and to one end—until he is stirred up and told to "move on" too.

CHAPTER XX

A New Lodger

THE LONG VACATION SAUNTERS on towards term-time like an idle river very leisurely strolling down a flat country to the sea. Mr. Guppy saunters along with it congenially. He has blunted the blade of his penknife and broken the point off by sticking that instrument into his desk in every direction. Not that he bears the desk any ill will, but he must do something, and it must be something of an unexciting nature, which will lay neither his physical nor his intellectual energies under too heavy contribution. He finds that nothing agrees with him so well as to make little gyrations on one leg of his stool, and stab his desk, and gape.

Kenge and Carboy are out of town, and the articled clerk has taken out a shooting license and gone down to his father's, and Mr. Guppy's two fellow-stipendiaries are away on leave. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Richard Carstone divide the dignity of the office. But Mr. Carstone is for the time being established in Kenge's room, whereat Mr. Guppy chafes. So exceedingly that he with biting sarcasm informs his mother, in the confidential moments when he sups with her off a lobster and lettuce in the Old Street Road, that he is afraid the office is hardly good enough for swells, and that if he had known there was a swell coming, he would have got it painted.

Mr. Guppy suspects everybody who enters on the occupation of a stool in Kenge and Carboy's office of entertaining, as a matter of course, sinister designs upon him. He is clear that every such person wants to depose him. If he be ever asked how, why, when, or wherefore, he shuts up one eye and shakes his head. On the strength of these profound views, he in the most ingenious manner takes infinite pains to counterplot when there is no plot, and plays the deepest games of chess without any adversary.

It is a source of much gratification to Mr. Guppy, therefore, to find the new-comer constantly poring over the papers in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, for he well knows that nothing but confusion and failure can come of that. His

satisfaction communicates itself to a third saunterer through the long vacation in Kenge and Carboy's office, to wit, Young Smallweed.

Whether Young Smallweed (metaphorically called Small and eke Chick Weed, as it were jocularly to express a fledgling) was ever a boy is much doubted in Lincoln's Inn. He is now something under fifteen and an old limb of the law. He is facetiously understood to entertain a passion for a lady at a cigar-shop in the neighbourhood of Chancery Lane and for her sake to have broken off a contract with another lady, to whom he had been engaged some years. He is a town-made article, of small stature and weazen features, but may be perceived from a considerable distance by means of his very tall hat. To become a Guppy is the object of his ambition. He dresses at that gentleman (by whom he is patronized), talks at him, walks at him, founds himself entirely on him. He is honoured with Mr. Guppy's particular confidence and occasionally advises him, from the deep wells of his experience, on difficult points in private life.

Mr. Guppy has been lolling out of window all the morning after trying all the stools in succession and finding none of them easy, and after several times putting his head into the iron safe with a notion of cooling it. Mr. Smallweed has been twice dispatched for effervescent drinks, and has twice mixed them in the two official tumblers and stirred them up with the ruler. Mr. Guppy propounds for Mr. Smallweed's consideration the paradox that the more you drink the thirstier you are and reclines his head upon the window-sill in a state of hopeless languor.

While thus looking out into the shade of Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, surveying the intolerable bricks and mortar, Mr. Guppy becomes conscious of a manly whisker emerging from the cloistered walk below and turning itself up in the direction of his face. At the same time, a low whistle is wafted through the Inn and a suppressed voice cries, "Hip! Gup-py!"

"Why, you don't mean it!" says Mr. Guppy, aroused. "Small! Here's Jobling!" Small's head looks out of window too and nods to Jobling.

"Where have you sprung up from?" inquires Mr. Guppy.

"From the market-gardens down by Deptford. I can't stand it any longer. I must enlist. I say! I wish you'd lend me half a crown. Upon my soul, I'm hungry."

Jobling looks hungry and also has the appearance of having run to seed in the market-gardens down by Deptford.

“I say! Just throw out half a crown if you have got one to spare. I want to get some dinner.”

“Will you come and dine with me?” says Mr. Guppy, throwing out the coin, which Mr. Jobling catches neatly.

“How long should I have to hold out?” says Jobling.

“Not half an hour. I am only waiting here till the enemy goes, returns Mr. Guppy, butting inward with his head.

“What enemy?”

“A new one. Going to be articled. Will you wait?”

“Can you give a fellow anything to read in the meantime?” says Mr. Jobling.

Smallweed suggests the law list. But Mr. Jobling declares with much earnestness that he “can’t stand it.”

“You shall have the paper,” says Mr. Guppy. “He shall bring it down. But you had better not be seen about here. Sit on our staircase and read. It’s a quiet place.”

Jobling nods intelligence and acquiescence. The sagacious Smallweed supplies him with the newspaper and occasionally drops his eye upon him from the landing as a precaution against his becoming disgusted with waiting and making an untimely departure. At last the enemy retreats, and then Smallweed fetches Mr. Jobling up.

“Well, and how are you?” says Mr. Guppy, shaking hands with him.

“So, so. How are you?”

Mr. Guppy replying that he is not much to boast of, Mr. Jobling ventures on the question, “How is SHE?” This Mr. Guppy resents as a liberty, retorting, “Jobling, there ARE chords in the human mind—” Jobling begs pardon.

“Any subject but that!” says Mr. Guppy with a gloomy enjoyment of his injury. “For there ARE chords, Jobling—”

Mr. Jobling begs pardon again.

During this short colloquy, the active Smallweed, who is of the dinner party, has written in legal characters on a slip of paper, “Return immediately.” This notification to all whom it may concern, he inserts in the letter-box, and then putting on the tall hat at the angle of inclination at which Mr. Guppy wears his, informs his patron that they may now make themselves scarce.

Accordingly they betake themselves to a neighbouring dining-house, of the class known among its frequenters by the denomination slap-bang, where the waitress, a bouncing young female of forty, is supposed to have made some impression on the susceptible Smallweed, of whom it may be remarked that he is a weird changeling to whom years are nothing. He stands precociously possessed of centuries of owlish wisdom. If he ever lay in a cradle, it seems as if he must have lain there in a tail-coat. He has an old, old eye, has Smallweed; and he drinks and smokes in a monkeyish way; and his neck is stiff in his collar; and he is never to be taken in; and he knows all about it, whatever it is. In short, in his bringing up he has been so nursed by Law and Equity that he has become a kind of fossil imp, to account for whose terrestrial existence it is reported at the public offices that his father was John Doe and his mother the only female member of the Roe family, also that his first long-clothes were made from a blue bag.

Into the dining-house, unaffected by the seductive show in the window of artificially whitened cauliflowers and poultry, verdant baskets of peas, coolly blooming cucumbers, and joints ready for the spit, Mr. Smallweed leads the way. They know him there and defer to him. He has his favourite box, he bespeaks all the papers, he is down upon bald patriarchs, who keep them more than ten minutes afterwards. It is of no use trying him with anything less than a full-sized “bread” or proposing to him any joint in cut unless it is in the very best cut. In the matter of gravy he is adamant.

Conscious of his elfin power and submitting to his dread experience, Mr. Guppy consults him in the choice of that day’s banquet, turning an appealing look towards him as the waitress repeats the catalogue of viands and saying “What do YOU take, Chick?” Chick, out of the profundity of his artfulness, preferring “veal and ham and French beans—and don’t you forget the stuffing, Polly” (with an unearthly cock of his venerable eye), Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling give the like order. Three pint pots of half-and-half are superadded. Quickly the waitress returns bearing what is apparently a model of the Tower of Babel but what is really a pile of plates and flat tin dish-covers. Mr. Smallweed, approving of what is set before him, conveys intelligent benignity into his ancient eye and winks upon her. Then, amid a constant coming in, and going out, and running about, and a clatter of crockery, and a rumbling up and down of the machine which brings the nice cuts from the kitchen, and a shrill crying for more nice cuts down the

speaking-pipe, and a shrill reckoning of the cost of nice cuts that have been disposed of, and a general flush and steam of hot joints, cut and uncut, and a considerably heated atmosphere in which the soiled knives and tablecloths seem to break out spontaneously into eruptions of grease and blotches of beer, the legal triumvirate appease their appetites.

Mr. Jobling is buttoned up closer than mere adornment might require. His hat presents at the rims a peculiar appearance of a glistening nature, as if it had been a favourite snail-promenade. The same phenomenon is visible on some parts of his coat, and particularly at the seams. He has the faded appearance of a gentleman in embarrassed circumstances; even his light whiskers droop with something of a shabby air.

His appetite is so vigorous that it suggests spare living for some little time back. He makes such a speedy end of his plate of veal and ham, bringing it to a close while his companions are yet midway in theirs, that Mr. Guppy proposes another. “Thank you, Guppy,” says Mr. Jobling, “I really don’t know but what I WILL take another.”

Another being brought, he falls to with great goodwill.

Mr. Guppy takes silent notice of him at intervals until he is half way through this second plate and stops to take an enjoying pull at his pint pot of half-and-half (also renewed) and stretches out his legs and rubs his hands. Beholding him in which glow of contentment, Mr. Guppy says, “You are a man again, Tony!”

“Well, not quite yet,” says Mr. Jobling. “Say, just born.”

“Will you take any other vegetables? Grass? Peas? Summer cabbage?”

“Thank you, Guppy,” says Mr. Jobling. “I really don’t know but what I WILL take summer cabbage.”

Order given; with the sarcastic addition (from Mr. Smallweed) of “Without slugs, Polly!” And cabbage produced.

“I am growing up, Guppy,” says Mr. Jobling, plying his knife and fork with a relishing steadiness.

“Glad to hear it.”

“In fact, I have just turned into my teens,” says Mr. Jobling.

He says no more until he has performed his task, which he achieves as Messrs. Guppy and Smallweed finish theirs, thus getting over the ground in excellent style and beating those two gentlemen easily by a veal and ham and a cabbage.

“Now, Small,” says Mr. Guppy, “what would you recommend about pastry?”

“Marrow puddings,” says Mr. Smallweed instantly.

“Aye, aye!” cries Mr. Jobling with an arch look. “You’re there, are you? Thank you, Mr. Guppy, I don’t know but what I WILL take a marrow pudding.”

Three marrow puddings being produced, Mr. Jobling adds in a pleasant humour that he is coming of age fast. To these succeed, by command of Mr. Smallweed, “three Cheshires,” and to those “three small rums.” This apex of the entertainment happily reached, Mr. Jobling puts up his legs on the carpeted seat (having his own side of the box to himself), leans against the wall, and says, “I am grown up now, Guppy. I have arrived at maturity.”

“What do you think, now,” says Mr. Guppy, “about—you don’t mind Smallweed?”

“Not the least in the world. I have the pleasure of drinking his good health.”

“Sir, to you!” says Mr. Smallweed.

“I was saying, what do you think NOW,” pursues Mr. Guppy, “of enlisting?”

“Why, what I may think after dinner,” returns Mr. Jobling, “is one thing, my dear Guppy, and what I may think before dinner is another thing. Still, even after dinner, I ask myself the question, What am I to do? How am I to live? Ill fo manger, you know,” says Mr. Jobling, pronouncing that word as if he meant a necessary fixture in an English stable. “Ill fo manger. That’s the French saying, and mangering is as necessary to me as it is to a Frenchman. Or more so.”

Mr. Smallweed is decidedly of opinion “much more so.”

“If any man had told me,” pursues Jobling, “even so lately as when you and I had the frisk down in Lincolnshire, Guppy, and drove over to see that house at Castle Wold—”

Mr. Smallweed corrects him—Chesney Wold.

“Chesney Wold. (I thank my honourable friend for that cheer.) If any man had told me then that I should be as hard up at the present time as I literally find myself, I should have—well, I should have pitched into him,” says Mr. Jobling, taking a little rum-and-water with an air of desperate resignation; “I should have let fly at his head.”

“Still, Tony, you were on the wrong side of the post then,” remonstrates Mr. Guppy. “You were talking about nothing else in the gig.”

“Guppy,” says Mr. Jobling, “I will not deny it. I was on the wrong side of the post. But I trusted to things coming round.”

That very popular trust in flat things coming round! Not in their being beaten round, or worked round, but in their “coming” round! As though a lunatic should trust in the world’s “coming” triangular!

“I had confident expectations that things would come round and be all square,” says Mr. Jobling with some vagueness of expression and perhaps of meaning too. “But I was disappointed. They never did. And when it came to creditors making rows at the office and to people that the office dealt with making complaints about dirty trifles of borrowed money, why there was an end of that connexion. And of any new professional connexion too, for if I was to give a reference to-morrow, it would be mentioned and would sew me up. Then what’s a fellow to do? I have been keeping out of the way and living cheap down about the market-gardens, but what’s the use of living cheap when you have got no money? You might as well live dear.”

“Better,” Mr. Smallweed thinks.

“Certainly. It’s the fashionable way; and fashion and whiskers have been my weaknesses, and I don’t care who knows it,” says Mr. Jobling. “They are great weaknesses—Damme, sir, they are great. Well,” proceeds Mr. Jobling after a defiant visit to his rum-and-water, “what can a fellow do, I ask you, BUT enlist?”

Mr. Guppy comes more fully into the conversation to state what, in his opinion, a fellow can do. His manner is the gravely impressive manner of a man who has not committed himself in life otherwise than as he has become the victim of a tender sorrow of the heart.

“Jobling,” says Mr. Guppy, “myself and our mutual friend Smallweed —”

Mr. Smallweed modestly observes, “Gentlemen both!” and drinks.

“—Have had a little conversation on this matter more than once since you—”

“Say, got the sack!” cries Mr. Jobling bitterly. “Say it, Guppy. You mean it.”

“No-o-o! Left the Inn,” Mr. Smallweed delicately suggests.

“Since you left the Inn, Jobling,” says Mr. Guppy; “and I have mentioned to our mutual friend Smallweed a plan I have lately thought of proposing. You know Snagsby the stationer?”

“I know there is such a stationer,” returns Mr. Jobling. “He was not ours, and I am not acquainted with him.”

“He IS ours, Jobling, and I AM acquainted with him,” Mr. Guppy retorts. “Well, sir! I have lately become better acquainted with him through some accidental circumstances that have made me a visitor of his in private life. Those circumstances it is not necessary to offer in argument. They may—or they may not—have some reference to a subject which may—or may not—have cast its shadow on my existence.”

As it is Mr. Guppy’s perplexing way with boastful misery to tempt his particular friends into this subject, and the moment they touch it, to turn on them with that trenchant severity about the chords in the human mind, both Mr. Jobling and Mr. Smallweed decline the pitfall by remaining silent.

“Such things may be,” repeats Mr. Guppy, “or they may not be. They are no part of the case. It is enough to mention that both Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby are very willing to oblige me and that Snagsby has, in busy times, a good deal of copying work to give out. He has all Tulkinghorn’s, and an excellent business besides. I believe if our mutual friend Smallweed were put into the box, he could prove this?”

Mr. Smallweed nods and appears greedy to be sworn.

“Now, gentlemen of the jury,” says Mr. Guppy, “—I mean, now, Jobling —you may say this is a poor prospect of a living. Granted. But it’s better than nothing, and better than enlistment. You want time. There must be time for these late affairs to blow over. You might live through it on much worse terms than by writing for Snagsby.”

Mr. Jobling is about to interrupt when the sagacious Smallweed checks him with a dry cough and the words, “Hem! Shakspeare!”

“There are two branches to this subject, Jobling,” says Mr. Guppy. “That is the first. I come to the second. You know Krook, the Chancellor, across the lane. Come, Jobling,” says Mr. Guppy in his encouraging cross-examination-tone, “I think you know Krook, the Chancellor, across the lane?”

“I know him by sight,” says Mr. Jobling.

“You know him by sight. Very well. And you know little Flite?”

“Everybody knows her,” says Mr. Jobling.

“Everybody knows her. VERY well. Now it has been one of my duties of late to pay Flite a certain weekly allowance, deducting from it the amount of her weekly rent, which I have paid (in consequence of instructions I have received) to Krook himself, regularly in her presence. This has brought me into communication with Krook and into a knowledge of his house and his habits. I know he has a room to let. You may live there at a very low charge under any name you like, as quietly as if you were a hundred miles off. He’ll ask no questions and would accept you as a tenant at a word from me—before the clock strikes, if you chose. And I tell you another thing, Jobling,” says Mr. Guppy, who has suddenly lowered his voice and become familiar again, “he’s an extraordinary old chap—always rummaging among a litter of papers and grubbing away at teaching himself to read and write, without getting on a bit, as it seems to me. He is a most extraordinary old chap, sir. I don’t know but what it might be worth a fellow’s while to look him up a bit.”

“You don’t mean—” Mr. Jobling begins.

“I mean,” returns Mr. Guppy, shrugging his shoulders with becoming modesty, “that I can’t make him out. I appeal to our mutual friend Smallweed whether he has or has not heard me remark that I can’t make him out.”

Mr. Smallweed bears the concise testimony, “A few!”

“I have seen something of the profession and something of life, Tony,” says Mr. Guppy, “and it’s seldom I can’t make a man out, more or less. But such an old card as this, so deep, so sly, and secret (though I don’t believe he is ever sober), I never came across. Now, he must be precious old, you know, and he has not a soul about him, and he is reported to be immensely rich; and whether he is a smuggler, or a receiver, or an unlicensed pawnbroker, or a money-lender—all of which I have thought likely at different times—it might pay you to knock up a sort of knowledge of him. I don’t see why you shouldn’t go in for it, when everything else suits.”

Mr. Jobling, Mr. Guppy, and Mr. Smallweed all lean their elbows on the table and their chins upon their hands, and look at the ceiling. After a time, they all drink, slowly lean back, put their hands in their pockets, and look at one another.

“If I had the energy I once possessed, Tony!” says Mr. Guppy with a

sigh. “But there are chords in the human mind—”

Expressing the remainder of the desolate sentiment in rum-and-water, Mr. Guppy concludes by resigning the adventure to Tony Jobling and informing him that during the vacation and while things are slack, his purse, “as far as three or four or even five pound goes,” will be at his disposal. “For never shall it be said,” Mr. Guppy adds with emphasis, “that William Guppy turned his back upon his friend!”

The latter part of the proposal is so directly to the purpose that Mr. Jobling says with emotion, “Guppy, my trump, your fist!” Mr. Guppy presents it, saying, “Jobling, my boy, there it is!” Mr. Jobling returns, “Guppy, we have been pals now for some years!” Mr. Guppy replies, “Jobling, we have.”

They then shake hands, and Mr. Jobling adds in a feeling manner, “Thank you, Guppy, I don’t know but what I WILL take another glass for old acquaintance sake.”

“Krook’s last lodger died there,” observes Mr. Guppy in an incidental way.

“Did he though!” says Mr. Jobling.

“There was a verdict. Accidental death. You don’t mind that?”

“No,” says Mr. Jobling, “I don’t mind it; but he might as well have died somewhere else. It’s devilish odd that he need go and die at MY place!” Mr. Jobling quite resents this liberty, several times returning to it with such remarks as, “There are places enough to die in, I should think!” or, “He wouldn’t have liked my dying at HIS place, I dare say!”

However, the compact being virtually made, Mr. Guppy proposes to dispatch the trusty Smallweed to ascertain if Mr. Krook is at home, as in that case they may complete the negotiation without delay. Mr. Jobling approving, Smallweed puts himself under the tall hat and conveys it out of the dining-rooms in the Guppy manner. He soon returns with the intelligence that Mr. Krook is at home and that he has seen him through the shop-door, sitting in the back premises, sleeping “like one o’clock.”

“Then I’ll pay,” says Mr. Guppy, “and we’ll go and see him. Small, what will it be?”

Mr. Smallweed, compelling the attendance of the waitress with one hitch of his eyelash, instantly replies as follows: “Four veals and hams is three, and four potatoes is three and four, and one summer cabbage is three and

six, and three marrows is four and six, and six breads is five, and three Cheshires is five and three, and four half-pints of half-and-half is six and three, and four small rums is eight and three, and three Pollys is eight and six. Eight and six in half a sovereign, Polly, and eighteenpence out!”

Not at all excited by these stupendous calculations, Smallweed dismisses his friends with a cool nod and remains behind to take a little admiring notice of Polly, as opportunity may serve, and to read the daily papers, which are so very large in proportion to himself, shorn of his hat, that when he holds up the Times to run his eye over the columns, he seems to have retired for the night and to have disappeared under the bedclothes.

Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling repair to the rag and bottle shop, where they find Krook still sleeping like one o’clock, that is to say, breathing stertorously with his chin upon his breast and quite insensible to any external sounds or even to gentle shaking. On the table beside him, among the usual lumber, stand an empty gin-bottle and a glass. The unwholesome air is so stained with this liquor that even the green eyes of the cat upon her shelf, as they open and shut and glimmer on the visitors, look drunk.

“Hold up here!” says Mr. Guppy, giving the relaxed figure of the old man another shake. “Mr. Krook! Halloa, sir!”

But it would seem as easy to wake a bundle of old clothes with a spirituous heat smouldering in it. “Did you ever see such a stupor as he falls into, between drink and sleep?” says Mr. Guppy.

“If this is his regular sleep,” returns Jobling, rather alarmed, “it’ll last a long time one of these days, I am thinking.”

“It’s always more like a fit than a nap,” says Mr. Guppy, shaking him again. “Halloa, your lordship! Why, he might be robbed fifty times over! Open your eyes!”

After much ado, he opens them, but without appearing to see his visitors or any other objects. Though he crosses one leg on another, and folds his hands, and several times closes and opens his parched lips, he seems to all intents and purposes as insensible as before.

“He is alive, at any rate,” says Mr. Guppy. “How are you, my Lord Chancellor. I have brought a friend of mine, sir, on a little matter of business.”

The old man still sits, often smacking his dry lips without the least consciousness. After some minutes he makes an attempt to rise. They help

him up, and he staggers against the wall and stares at them.

"How do you do, Mr. Krook?" says Mr. Guppy in some discomfiture. "How do you do, sir? You are looking charming, Mr. Krook. I hope you are pretty well?"

The old man, in aiming a purposeless blow at Mr. Guppy, or at nothing, feebly swings himself round and comes with his face against the wall. So he remains for a minute or two, heaped up against it, and then staggers down the shop to the front door. The air, the movement in the court, the lapse of time, or the combination of these things recovers him. He comes back pretty steadily, adjusting his fur cap on his head and looking keenly at them.

"Your servant, gentlemen; I've been dozing. Hi! I am hard to wake, odd times."

"Rather so, indeed, sir," responds Mr. Guppy.

"What? You've been a-trying to do it, have you?" says the suspicious Krook.

"Only a little," Mr. Guppy explains.

The old man's eye resting on the empty bottle, he takes it up, examines it, and slowly tilts it upside down.

"I say!" he cries like the hobgoblin in the story. "Somebody's been making free here!"

"I assure you we found it so," says Mr. Guppy. "Would you allow me to get it filled for you?"

"Yes, certainly I would!" cries Krook in high glee. "Certainly I would! Don't mention it! Get it filled next door—Sol's Arms—the Lord Chancellor's fourteenpenny. Bless you, they know ME!"

He so presses the empty bottle upon Mr. Guppy that that gentleman, with a nod to his friend, accepts the trust and hurries out and hurries in again with the bottle filled. The old man receives it in his arms like a beloved grandchild and pats it tenderly.

"But, I say," he whispers, with his eyes screwed up, after tasting it, "this ain't the Lord Chancellor's fourteenpenny. This is eighteenpenny!"

"I thought you might like that better," says Mr. Guppy.

"You're a nobleman, sir," returns Krook with another taste, and his hot breath seems to come towards them like a flame. "You're a baron of the land."

Taking advantage of this auspicious moment, Mr. Guppy presents his

friend under the impromptu name of Mr. Weevle and states the object of their visit. Krook, with his bottle under his arm (he never gets beyond a certain point of either drunkenness or sobriety), takes time to survey his proposed lodger and seems to approve of him. “You’d like to see the room, young man?” he says. “Ah! It’s a good room! Been whitewashed. Been cleaned down with soft soap and soda. Hi! It’s worth twice the rent, letting alone my company when you want it and such a cat to keep the mice away.”

Commending the room after this manner, the old man takes them upstairs, where indeed they do find it cleaner than it used to be and also containing some old articles of furniture which he has dug up from his inexhaustible stores. The terms are easily concluded—for the Lord Chancellor cannot be hard on Mr. Guppy, associated as he is with Kenge and Carboy, Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and other famous claims on his professional consideration—and it is agreed that Mr. Weevle shall take possession on the morrow. Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy then repair to Cook’s Court, Cursitor Street, where the personal introduction of the former to Mr. Snagsby is effected and (more important) the vote and interest of Mrs. Snagsby are secured. They then report progress to the eminent Smallweed, waiting at the office in his tall hat for that purpose, and separate, Mr. Guppy explaining that he would terminate his little entertainment by standing treat at the play but that there are chords in the human mind which would render it a hollow mockery.

On the morrow, in the dusk of evening, Mr. Weevle modestly appears at Krook’s, by no means incommoded with luggage, and establishes himself in his new lodging, where the two eyes in the shutters stare at him in his sleep, as if they were full of wonder. On the following day Mr. Weevle, who is a handy good-for-nothing kind of young fellow, borrows a needle and thread of Miss Flite and a hammer of his landlord and goes to work devising apologies for window-curtains, and knocking up apologies for shelves, and hanging up his two teacups, milkpot, and crockery sundries on a pennyworth of little hooks, like a shipwrecked sailor making the best of it.

But what Mr. Weevle prizes most of all his few possessions (next after his light whiskers, for which he has an attachment that only whiskers can awaken in the breast of man) is a choice collection of copper-plate impressions from that truly national work The Divinities of Albion, or Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, representing ladies of title and fashion in

every variety of smirk that art, combined with capital, is capable of producing. With these magnificent portraits, unworthily confined in a band-box during his seclusion among the market-gardens, he decorates his apartment; and as the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty wears every variety of fancy dress, plays every variety of musical instrument, fondles every variety of dog, ogles every variety of prospect, and is backed up by every variety of flower-pot and balustrade, the result is very imposing.

But fashion is Mr. Weevle's, as it was Tony Jobling's, weakness. To borrow yesterday's paper from the Sol's Arms of an evening and read about the brilliant and distinguished meteors that are shooting across the fashionable sky in every direction is unspeakable consolation to him. To know what member of what brilliant and distinguished circle accomplished the brilliant and distinguished feat of joining it yesterday or contemplates the no less brilliant and distinguished feat of leaving it to-morrow gives him a thrill of joy. To be informed what the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty is about, and means to be about, and what Galaxy marriages are on the tapis, and what Galaxy rumours are in circulation, is to become acquainted with the most glorious destinies of mankind. Mr. Weevle reverts from this intelligence to the Galaxy portraits implicated, and seems to know the originals, and to be known of them.

For the rest he is a quiet lodger, full of handy shifts and devices as before mentioned, able to cook and clean for himself as well as to carpenter, and developing social inclinations after the shades of evening have fallen on the court. At those times, when he is not visited by Mr. Guppy or by a small light in his likeness quenched in a dark hat, he comes out of his dull room—where he has inherited the deal wilderness of desk bespattered with a rain of ink—and talks to Krook or is "very free," as they call it in the court, commendingly, with any one disposed for conversation. Wherefore, Mrs. Piper, who leads the court, is impelled to offer two remarks to Mrs. Perkins: firstly, that if her Johnny was to have whiskers, she could wish 'em to be identically like that young man's; and secondly, "Mark my words, Mrs. Perkins, ma'am, and don't you be surprised, Lord bless you, if that young man comes in at last for old Krook's money!"

CHAPTER XXI

The Smallweed Family

IN A RATHER ILL-FAVOURED and ill-savoured neighbourhood, though one of its rising grounds bears the name of Mount Pleasant, the Elfin Smallweed, christened Bartholomew and known on the domestic hearth as Bart, passes that limited portion of his time on which the office and its contingencies have no claim. He dwells in a little narrow street, always solitary, shady, and sad, closely bricked in on all sides like a tomb, but where there yet lingers the stump of an old forest tree whose flavour is about as fresh and natural as the Smallweed smack of youth.

There has been only one child in the Smallweed family for several generations. Little old men and women there have been, but no child, until Mr. Smallweed's grandmother, now living, became weak in her intellect and fell (for the first time) into a childish state. With such infantine graces as a total want of observation, memory, understanding, and interest, and an eternal disposition to fall asleep over the fire and into it, Mr. Smallweed's grandmother has undoubtedly brightened the family.

Mr. Smallweed's grandfather is likewise of the party. He is in a helpless condition as to his lower, and nearly so as to his upper, limbs, but his mind is unimpaired. It holds, as well as it ever held, the first four rules of arithmetic and a certain small collection of the hardest facts. In respect of ideality, reverence, wonder, and other such phrenological attributes, it is no worse off than it used to be. Everything that Mr. Smallweed's grandfather ever put away in his mind was a grub at first, and is a grub at last. In all his life he has never bred a single butterfly.

The father of this pleasant grandfather, of the neighbourhood of Mount Pleasant, was a horny-skinned, two-legged, money-getting species of spider who spun webs to catch unwary flies and retired into holes until they were entrapped. The name of this old pagan's god was Compound Interest. He lived for it, married it, died of it. Meeting with a heavy loss in an honest little enterprise in which all the loss was intended to have been on the other

side, he broke something—something necessary to his existence, therefore it couldn't have been his heart—and made an end of his career. As his character was not good, and he had been bred at a charity school in a complete course, according to question and answer, of those ancient people the Amorites and Hittites, he was frequently quoted as an example of the failure of education.

His spirit shone through his son, to whom he had always preached of "going out" early in life and whom he made a clerk in a sharp scrivener's office at twelve years old. There the young gentleman improved his mind, which was of a lean and anxious character, and developing the family gifts, gradually elevated himself into the discounting profession. Going out early in life and marrying late, as his father had done before him, he too begat a lean and anxious-minded son, who in his turn, going out early in life and marrying late, became the father of Bartholomew and Judith Smallweed, twins. During the whole time consumed in the slow growth of this family tree, the house of Smallweed, always early to go out and late to marry, has strengthened itself in its practical character, has discarded all amusements, discountenanced all story-books, fairy-tales, fictions, and fables, and banished all levities whatsoever. Hence the gratifying fact that it has had no child born to it and that the complete little men and women whom it has produced have been observed to bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds.

At the present time, in the dark little parlour certain feet below the level of the street—a grim, hard, uncouth parlour, only ornamented with the coarsest of baize table-covers, and the hardest of sheet-iron tea-trays, and offering in its decorative character no bad allegorical representation of Grandfather Smallweed's mind—seated in two black horsehair porter's chairs, one on each side of the fire-place, the superannuated Mr. and Mrs. Smallweed while away the rosy hours. On the stove are a couple of trivets for the pots and kettles which it is Grandfather Smallweed's usual occupation to watch, and projecting from the chimney-piece between them is a sort of brass gallows for roasting, which he also superintends when it is in action. Under the venerable Mr. Smallweed's seat and guarded by his spindle legs is a drawer in his chair, reported to contain property to a fabulous amount. Beside him is a spare cushion with which he is always provided in order that he may have something to throw at the venerable

partner of his respected age whenever she makes an allusion to money—a subject on which he is particularly sensitive.

"And where's Bart?" Grandfather Smallweed inquires of Judy, Bart's twin sister.

"He an't come in yet," says Judy.

"It's his tea-time, isn't it?"

"No."

"How much do you mean to say it wants then?"

"Ten minutes."

"Hey?"

"Ten minutes." (Loud on the part of Judy.)

"Ho!" says Grandfather Smallweed. "Ten minutes."

Grandmother Smallweed, who has been mumbling and shaking her head at the trivets, hearing figures mentioned, connects them with money and screeches like a horrible old parrot without any plumage, "Ten ten-pound notes!"

Grandfather Smallweed immediately throws the cushion at her.

"Drat you, be quiet!" says the good old man.

The effect of this act of jaculation is twofold. It not only doubles up Mrs. Smallweed's head against the side of her porter's chair and causes her to present, when extricated by her granddaughter, a highly unbecoming state of cap, but the necessary exertion recoils on Mr. Smallweed himself, whom it throws back into HIS porter's chair like a broken puppet. The excellent old gentleman being at these times a mere clothes-bag with a black skull-cap on the top of it, does not present a very animated appearance until he has undergone the two operations at the hands of his granddaughter of being shaken up like a great bottle and poked and punched like a great bolster. Some indication of a neck being developed in him by these means, he and the sharer of his life's evening again fronting one another in their two porter's chairs, like a couple of sentinels long forgotten on their post by the Black Serjeant, Death.

Judy the twin is worthy company for these associates. She is so indubitably sister to Mr. Smallweed the younger that the two kneaded into one would hardly make a young person of average proportions, while she so happily exemplifies the before-mentioned family likeness to the monkey tribe that attired in a spangled robe and cap she might walk about the table-

land on the top of a barrel-organ without exciting much remark as an unusual specimen. Under existing circumstances, however, she is dressed in a plain, spare gown of brown stuff.

Judy never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played at any game. She once or twice fell into children's company when she was about ten years old, but the children couldn't get on with Judy, and Judy couldn't get on with them. She seemed like an animal of another species, and there was instinctive repugnance on both sides. It is very doubtful whether Judy knows how to laugh. She has so rarely seen the thing done that the probabilities are strong the other way. Of anything like a youthful laugh, she certainly can have no conception. If she were to try one, she would find her teeth in her way, modelling that action of her face, as she has unconsciously modelled all its other expressions, on her pattern of sordid age. Such is Judy.

And her twin brother couldn't wind up a top for his life. He knows no more of Jack the Giant Killer or of Sinbad the Sailor than he knows of the people in the stars. He could as soon play at leap-frog or at cricket as change into a cricket or a frog himself. But he is so much the better off than his sister that on his narrow world of fact an opening has dawned into such broader regions as lie within the ken of Mr. Guppy. Hence his admiration and his emulation of that shining enchanter.

Judy, with a gong-like clash and clatter, sets one of the sheet-iron tea-trays on the table and arranges cups and saucers. The bread she puts on in an iron basket, and the butter (and not much of it) in a small pewter plate. Grandfather Smallweed looks hard after the tea as it is served out and asks Judy where the girl is.

"Charley, do you mean?" says Judy.

"Hey?" from Grandfather Smallweed.

"Charley, do you mean?"

This touches a spring in Grandmother Smallweed, who, chuckling as usual at the trivets, cries, "Over the water! Charley over the water, Charley over the water, over the water to Charley, Charley over the water, over the water to Charley!" and becomes quite energetic about it. Grandfather looks at the cushion but has not sufficiently recovered his late exertion.

"Ha!" he says when there is silence. "If that's her name. She eats a deal. It would be better to allow her for her keep."

Judy, with her brother's wink, shakes her head and purses up her mouth into no without saying it.

"No?" returns the old man. "Why not?"

"She'd want sixpence a day, and we can do it for less," says Judy.

"Sure?"

Judy answers with a nod of deepest meaning and calls, as she scrapes the butter on the loaf with every precaution against waste and cuts it into slices, "You, Charley, where are you?" Timidly obedient to the summons, a little girl in a rough apron and a large bonnet, with her hands covered with soap and water and a scrubbing brush in one of them, appears, and curtsys.

"What work are you about now?" says Judy, making an ancient snap at her like a very sharp old beldame.

"I'm a-cleaning the upstairs back room, miss," replies Charley.

"Mind you do it thoroughly, and don't loiter. Shirking won't do for me. Make haste! Go along!" cries Judy with a stamp upon the ground. "You girls are more trouble than you're worth, by half."

On this severe matron, as she returns to her task of scraping the butter and cutting the bread, falls the shadow of her brother, looking in at the window. For whom, knife and loaf in hand, she opens the street-door.

"Aye, aye, Bart!" says Grandfather Smallweed. "Here you are, hey?"

"Here I am," says Bart.

"Been along with your friend again, Bart?"

Small nods.

"Dining at his expense, Bart?"

Small nods again.

"That's right. Live at his expense as much as you can, and take warning by his foolish example. That's the use of such a friend. The only use you can put him to," says the venerable sage.

His grandson, without receiving this good counsel as dutifully as he might, honours it with all such acceptance as may lie in a slight wink and a nod and takes a chair at the tea-table. The four old faces then hover over teacups like a company of ghastly cherubim, Mrs. Smallweed perpetually twitching her head and chattering at the trivets and Mr. Smallweed requiring to be repeatedly shaken up like a large black draught.

"Yes, yes," says the good old gentleman, reverting to his lesson of wisdom. "That's such advice as your father would have given you, Bart.

You never saw your father. More's the pity. He was my true son." Whether it is intended to be conveyed that he was particularly pleasant to look at, on that account, does not appear.

"He was my true son," repeats the old gentleman, folding his bread and butter on his knee, "a good accountant, and died fifteen years ago."

Mrs. Smallweed, following her usual instinct, breaks out with "Fifteen hundred pound. Fifteen hundred pound in a black box, fifteen hundred pound locked up, fifteen hundred pound put away and hid!" Her worthy husband, setting aside his bread and butter, immediately discharges the cushion at her, crushes her against the side of her chair, and falls back in his own, overpowered. His appearance, after visiting Mrs. Smallweed with one of these admonitions, is particularly impressive and not wholly prepossessing, firstly because the exertion generally twists his black skull-cap over one eye and gives him an air of goblin rakishness, secondly because he mutters violent imprecations against Mrs. Smallweed, and thirdly because the contrast between those powerful expressions and his powerless figure is suggestive of a baleful old malignant who would be very wicked if he could. All this, however, is so common in the Smallweed family circle that it produces no impression. The old gentleman is merely shaken and has his internal feathers beaten up, the cushion is restored to its usual place beside him, and the old lady, perhaps with her cap adjusted and perhaps not, is planted in her chair again, ready to be bowled down like a ninepin.

Some time elapses in the present instance before the old gentleman is sufficiently cool to resume his discourse, and even then he mixes it up with several edifying expletives addressed to the unconscious partner of his bosom, who holds communication with nothing on earth but the trivets. As thus: "If your father, Bart, had lived longer, he might have been worth a deal of money—you brimstone chatterer!—but just as he was beginning to build up the house that he had been making the foundations for, through many a year—you jade of a magpie, jackdaw, and poll-parrot, what do you mean!—he took ill and died of a low fever, always being a sparing and a spare man, full of business care—I should like to throw a cat at you instead of a cushion, and I will too if you make such a confounded fool of yourself!—and your mother, who was a prudent woman as dry as a chip, just dwindled away like touchwood after you and Judy were born—you are an

old pig. You are a brimstone pig. You're a head of swine!"

Judy, not interested in what she has often heard, begins to collect in a basin various tributary streams of tea, from the bottoms of cups and saucers and from the bottom of the tea-pot for the little charwoman's evening meal. In like manner she gets together, in the iron bread-basket, as many outside fragments and worn-down heels of loaves as the rigid economy of the house has left in existence.

"But your father and me were partners, Bart," says the old gentleman, "and when I am gone, you and Judy will have all there is. It's rare for you both that you went out early in life—Judy to the flower business, and you to the law. You won't want to spend it. You'll get your living without it, and put more to it. When I am gone, Judy will go back to the flower business and you'll still stick to the law."

One might infer from Judy's appearance that her business rather lay with the thorns than the flowers, but she has in her time been apprenticed to the art and mystery of artificial flower-making. A close observer might perhaps detect both in her eye and her brother's, when their venerable grandsire anticipates his being gone, some little impatience to know when he may be going, and some resentful opinion that it is time he went.

"Now, if everybody has done," says Judy, completing her preparations, "I'll have that girl in to her tea. She would never leave off if she took it by herself in the kitchen."

Charley is accordingly introduced, and under a heavy fire of eyes, sits down to her basin and a Druidical ruin of bread and butter. In the active superintendence of this young person, Judy Smallweed appears to attain a perfectly geological age and to date from the remotest periods. Her systematic manner of flying at her and pouncing on her, with or without pretence, whether or no, is wonderful, evincing an accomplishment in the art of girl-driving seldom reached by the oldest practitioners.

"Now, don't stare about you all the afternoon," cries Judy, shaking her head and stamping her foot as she happens to catch the glance which has been previously sounding the basin of tea, "but take your victuals and get back to your work."

"Yes, miss," says Charley.

"Don't say yes," returns Miss Smallweed, "for I know what you girls are. Do it without saying it, and then I may begin to believe you."

Charley swallows a great gulp of tea in token of submission and so disperses the Druidical ruins that Miss Smallweed charges her not to gormandize, which “in you girls,” she observes, is disgusting. Charley might find some more difficulty in meeting her views on the general subject of girls but for a knock at the door.

“See who it is, and don’t chew when you open it!” cries Judy.

The object of her attentions withdrawing for the purpose, Miss Smallweed takes that opportunity of jumbling the remainder of the bread and butter together and launching two or three dirty tea-cups into the ebb-tide of the basin of tea as a hint that she considers the eating and drinking terminated.

“Now! Who is it, and what’s wanted?” says the snappish Judy.

It is one Mr. George, it appears. Without other announcement or ceremony, Mr. George walks in.

“Whew!” says Mr. George. “You are hot here. Always a fire, eh? Well! Perhaps you do right to get used to one.” Mr. George makes the latter remark to himself as he nods to Grandfather Smallweed.

“Ho! It’s you!” cries the old gentleman. “How de do? How de do?”

“Middling,” replies Mr. George, taking a chair. “Your granddaughter I have had the honour of seeing before; my service to you, miss.”

“This is my grandson,” says Grandfather Smallweed. “You ha’n’t seen him before. He is in the law and not much at home.”

“My service to him, too! He is like his sister. He is very like his sister. He is devilish like his sister,” says Mr. George, laying a great and not altogether complimentary stress on his last adjective.

“And how does the world use you, Mr. George?” Grandfather Smallweed inquires, slowly rubbing his legs.

“Pretty much as usual. Like a football.”

He is a swarthy brown man of fifty, well made, and good looking, with crisp dark hair, bright eyes, and a broad chest. His sinewy and powerful hands, as sunburnt as his face, have evidently been used to a pretty rough life. What is curious about him is that he sits forward on his chair as if he were, from long habit, allowing space for some dress or accoutrements that he has altogether laid aside. His step too is measured and heavy and would go well with a weighty clash and jingle of spurs. He is close-shaved now, but his mouth is set as if his upper lip had been for years familiar with a

great moustache; and his manner of occasionally laying the open palm of his broad brown hand upon it is to the same effect. Altogether one might guess Mr. George to have been a trooper once upon a time.

A special contrast Mr. George makes to the Smallweed family. Trooper was never yet billeted upon a household more unlike him. It is a broadsword to an oyster-knife. His developed figure and their stunted forms, his large manner filling any amount of room and their little narrow pinched ways, his sounding voice and their sharp spare tones, are in the strongest and the strangest opposition. As he sits in the middle of the grim parlour, leaning a little forward, with his hands upon his thighs and his elbows squared, he looks as though, if he remained there long, he would absorb into himself the whole family and the whole four-roomed house, extra little back-kitchen and all.

"Do you rub your legs to rub life into 'em?" he asks of Grandfather Smallweed after looking round the room.

"Why, it's partly a habit, Mr. George, and—yes—it partly helps the circulation," he replies.

"The cir-cu-la-tion!" repeats Mr. George, folding his arms upon his chest and seeming to become two sizes larger. "Not much of that, I should think."

"Truly I'm old, Mr. George," says Grandfather Smallweed. "But I can carry my years. I'm older than HER," nodding at his wife, "and see what she is? You're a brimstone chatterer!" with a sudden revival of his late hostility.

"Unlucky old soul!" says Mr. George, turning his head in that direction. "Don't scold the old lady. Look at her here, with her poor cap half off her head and her poor hair all in a muddle. Hold up, ma'am. That's better. There we are! Think of your mother, Mr. Smallweed," says Mr. George, coming back to his seat from assisting her, "if your wife an't enough."

"I suppose you were an excellent son, Mr. George?" the old man hints with a leer.

The colour of Mr. George's face rather deepens as he replies, "Why no. I wasn't."

"I am astonished at it."

"So am I. I ought to have been a good son, and I think I meant to have been one. But I wasn't. I was a thundering bad son, that's the long and the short of it, and never was a credit to anybody."

"Surprising!" cries the old man.

“However,” Mr. George resumes, “the less said about it, the better now. Come! You know the agreement. Always a pipe out of the two months’ interest! (Bosh! It’s all correct. You needn’t be afraid to order the pipe. Here’s the new bill, and here’s the two months’ interest-money, and a devil-and-all of a scrape it is to get it together in my business.)”

Mr. George sits, with his arms folded, consuming the family and the parlour while Grandfather Smallweed is assisted by Judy to two black leathern cases out of a locked bureau, in one of which he secures the document he has just received, and from the other takes another similar document which he hands to Mr. George, who twists it up for a pipelight. As the old man inspects, through his glasses, every up-stroke and down-stroke of both documents before he releases them from their leathern prison, and as he counts the money three times over and requires Judy to say every word she utters at least twice, and is as tremulously slow of speech and action as it is possible to be, this business is a long time in progress. When it is quite concluded, and not before, he disengages his ravenous eyes and fingers from it and answers Mr. George’s last remark by saying, “Afraid to order the pipe? We are not so mercenary as that, sir. Judy, see directly to the pipe and the glass of cold brandy-and-water for Mr. George.”

The sportive twins, who have been looking straight before them all this time except when they have been engrossed by the black leathern cases, retire together, generally disdainful of the visitor, but leaving him to the old man as two young cubs might leave a traveller to the parental bear.

“And there you sit, I suppose, all the day long, eh?” says Mr. George with folded arms.

“Just so, just so,” the old man nods.

“And don’t you occupy yourself at all?”

“I watch the fire—and the boiling and the roasting—”

“When there is any,” says Mr. George with great expression.

“Just so. When there is any.”

“Don’t you read or get read to?”

The old man shakes his head with sharp sly triumph. “No, no. We have never been readers in our family. It don’t pay. Stuff. Idleness. Folly. No, no!”

“There’s not much to choose between your two states,” says the visitor

in a key too low for the old man's dull hearing as he looks from him to the old woman and back again. "I say!" in a louder voice.

"I hear you."

"You'll sell me up at last, I suppose, when I am a day in arrear."

"My dear friend!" cries Grandfather Smallweed, stretching out both hands to embrace him. "Never! Never, my dear friend! But my friend in the city that I got to lend you the money—HE might!"

"Oh! You can't answer for him?" says Mr. George, finishing the inquiry in his lower key with the words "You lying old rascal!"

"My dear friend, he is not to be depended on. I wouldn't trust him. He will have his bond, my dear friend."

"Devil doubt him," says Mr. George. Charley appearing with a tray, on which are the pipe, a small paper of tobacco, and the brandy-and-water, he asks her, "How do you come here! You haven't got the family face."

"I goes out to work, sir," returns Charley.

The trooper (if trooper he be or have been) takes her bonnet off, with a light touch for so strong a hand, and pats her on the head. "You give the house almost a wholesome look. It wants a bit of youth as much as it wants fresh air." Then he dismisses her, lights his pipe, and drinks to Mr. Smallweed's friend in the city—the one solitary flight of that esteemed old gentleman's imagination.

"So you think he might be hard upon me, eh?"

"I think he might—I am afraid he would. I have known him do it," says Grandfather Smallweed incautiously, "twenty times."

Incautiously, because his stricken better-half, who has been dozing over the fire for some time, is instantly aroused and jabbers "Twenty thousand pounds, twenty twenty-pound notes in a money-box, twenty guineas, twenty million twenty per cent, twenty—" and is then cut short by the flying cushion, which the visitor, to whom this singular experiment appears to be a novelty, snatches from her face as it crushes her in the usual manner.

"You're a brimstone idiot. You're a scorpion—a brimstone scorpion! You're a sweltering toad. You're a chattering clattering broomstick witch that ought to be burnt!" gasps the old man, prostrate in his chair. "My dear friend, will you shake me up a little?"

Mr. George, who has been looking first at one of them and then at the other, as if he were demented, takes his venerable acquaintance by the

throat on receiving this request, and dragging him upright in his chair as easily as if he were a doll, appears in two minds whether or no to shake all future power of cushioning out of him and shake him into his grave. Resisting the temptation, but agitating him violently enough to make his head roll like a harlequin's, he puts him smartly down in his chair again and adjusts his skull-cap with such a rub that the old man winks with both eyes for a minute afterwards.

"O Lord!" gasps Mr. Smallweed. "That'll do. Thank you, my dear friend, that'll do. Oh, dear me, I'm out of breath. O Lord!" And Mr. Smallweed says it not without evident apprehensions of his dear friend, who still stands over him looming larger than ever.

The alarming presence, however, gradually subsides into its chair and falls to smoking in long puffs, consoling itself with the philosophical reflection, "The name of your friend in the city begins with a D, comrade, and you're about right respecting the bond."

"Did you speak, Mr. George?" inquires the old man.

The trooper shakes his head, and leaning forward with his right elbow on his right knee and his pipe supported in that hand, while his other hand, resting on his left leg, squares his left elbow in a martial manner, continues to smoke. Meanwhile he looks at Mr. Smallweed with grave attention and now and then fans the cloud of smoke away in order that he may see him the more clearly.

"I take it," he says, making just as much and as little change in his position as will enable him to reach the glass to his lips with a round, full action, "that I am the only man alive (or dead either) that gets the value of a pipe out of YOU?"

"Well," returns the old man, "it's true that I don't see company, Mr. George, and that I don't treat. I can't afford to it. But as you, in your pleasant way, made your pipe a condition—"

"Why, it's not for the value of it; that's no great thing. It was a fancy to get it out of you. To have something in for my money."

"Ha! You're prudent, prudent, sir!" cries Grandfather Smallweed, rubbing his legs.

"Very. I always was." Puff. "It's a sure sign of my prudence that I ever found the way here." Puff. "Also, that I am what I am." Puff. "I am well known to be prudent," says Mr. George, composedly smoking. "I rose in

life that way."

"Don't be down-hearted, sir. You may rise yet."

Mr. George laughs and drinks.

"Ha'n't you no relations, now," asks Grandfather Smallweed with a twinkle in his eyes, "who would pay off this little principal or who would lend you a good name or two that I could persuade my friend in the city to make you a further advance upon? Two good names would be sufficient for my friend in the city. Ha'n't you no such relations, Mr. George?"

Mr. George, still composedly smoking, replies, "If I had, I shouldn't trouble them. I have been trouble enough to my belongings in my day. It MAY be a very good sort of penitence in a vagabond, who has wasted the best time of his life, to go back then to decent people that he never was a credit to and live upon them, but it's not my sort. The best kind of amends then for having gone away is to keep away, in my opinion."

"But natural affection, Mr. George," hints Grandfather Smallweed.

"For two good names, hey?" says Mr. George, shaking his head and still composedly smoking. "No. That's not my sort either."

Grandfather Smallweed has been gradually sliding down in his chair since his last adjustment and is now a bundle of clothes with a voice in it calling for Judy. That houri, appearing, shakes him up in the usual manner and is charged by the old gentleman to remain near him. For he seems chary of putting his visitor to the trouble of repeating his late attentions.

"Ha!" he observes when he is in trim again. "If you could have traced out the captain, Mr. George, it would have been the making of you. If when you first came here, in consequence of our advertisement in the newspapers —when I say 'our,' I'm alluding to the advertisements of my friend in the city, and one or two others who embark their capital in the same way, and are so friendly towards me as sometimes to give me a lift with my little pittance—if at that time you could have helped us, Mr. George, it would have been the making of you."

"I was willing enough to be 'made,' as you call it," says Mr. George, smoking not quite so placidly as before, for since the entrance of Judy he has been in some measure disturbed by a fascination, not of the admiring kind, which obliges him to look at her as she stands by her grandfather's chair, "but on the whole, I am glad I wasn't now."

"Why, Mr. George? In the name of—of brimstone, why?" says

Grandfather Smallweed with a plain appearance of exasperation. (Brimstone apparently suggested by his eye lighting on Mrs. Smallweed in her slumber.)

"For two reasons, comrade."

"And what two reasons, Mr. George? In the name of the—"

"Of our friend in the city?" suggests Mr. George, composedly drinking.

"Aye, if you like. What two reasons?"

"In the first place," returns Mr. George, but still looking at Judy as if she being so old and so like her grandfather it is indifferent which of the two he addresses, "you gentlemen took me in. You advertised that Mr. Hawdon (Captain Hawdon, if you hold to the saying 'Once a captain, always a captain') was to hear of something to his advantage."

"Well?" returns the old man shrilly and sharply.

"Well!" says Mr. George, smoking on. "It wouldn't have been much to his advantage to have been clapped into prison by the whole bill and judgment trade of London."

"How do you know that? Some of his rich relations might have paid his debts or compounded for 'em. Besides, he had taken US in. He owed us immense sums all round. I would sooner have strangled him than had no return. If I sit here thinking of him," snarls the old man, holding up his impotent ten fingers, "I want to strangle him now." And in a sudden access of fury, he throws the cushion at the unoffending Mrs. Smallweed, but it passes harmlessly on one side of her chair.

"I don't need to be told," returns the trooper, taking his pipe from his lips for a moment and carrying his eyes back from following the progress of the cushion to the pipe-bowl which is burning low, "that he carried on heavily and went to ruin. I have been at his right hand many a day when he was charging upon ruin full-gallop. I was with him when he was sick and well, rich and poor. I laid this hand upon him after he had run through everything and broken down everything beneath him—when he held a pistol to his head."

"I wish he had let it off," says the benevolent old man, "and blown his head into as many pieces as he owed pounds!"

"That would have been a smash indeed," returns the trooper coolly; "any way, he had been young, hopeful, and handsome in the days gone by, and I am glad I never found him, when he was neither, to lead to a result so much

to his advantage. That's reason number one."

"I hope number two's as good?" snarls the old man.

"Why, no. It's more of a selfish reason. If I had found him, I must have gone to the other world to look. He was there."

"How do you know he was there?"

"He wasn't here."

"How do you know he wasn't here?"

"Don't lose your temper as well as your money," says Mr. George, calmly knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "He was drowned long before. I am convinced of it. He went over a ship's side. Whether intentionally or accidentally, I don't know. Perhaps your friend in the city does. Do you know what that tune is, Mr. Smallweed?" he adds after breaking off to whistle one, accompanied on the table with the empty pipe.

"Tune!" replied the old man. "No. We never have tunes here."

"That's the Dead March in Saul. They bury soldiers to it, so it's the natural end of the subject. Now, if your pretty granddaughter—excuse me, miss—will condescend to take care of this pipe for two months, we shall save the cost of one next time. Good evening, Mr. Smallweed!"

"My dear friend!" the old man gives him both his hands.

"So you think your friend in the city will be hard upon me if I fall in a payment?" says the trooper, looking down upon him like a giant.

"My dear friend, I am afraid he will," returns the old man, looking up at him like a pygmy.

Mr. George laughs, and with a glance at Mr. Smallweed and a parting salutation to the scornful Judy, strides out of the parlour, clashing imaginary sabres and other metallic appurtenances as he goes.

"You're a damned rogue," says the old gentleman, making a hideous grimace at the door as he shuts it. "But I'll lime you, you dog, I'll lime you!"

After this amiable remark, his spirit soars into those enchanting regions of reflection which its education and pursuits have opened to it, and again he and Mrs. Smallweed while away the rosy hours, two unrelieved sentinels forgotten as aforesaid by the Black Serjeant.

While the twain are faithful to their post, Mr. George strides through the streets with a massive kind of swagger and a grave-enough face. It is eight o'clock now, and the day is fast drawing in. He stops hard by Waterloo

Bridge and reads a playbill, decides to go to Astley's Theatre. Being there, is much delighted with the horses and the feats of strength; looks at the weapons with a critical eye; disapproves of the combats as giving evidences of unskilful swordsmanship; but is touched home by the sentiments. In the last scene, when the Emperor of Tartary gets up into a cart and condescends to bless the united lovers by hovering over them with the Union Jack, his eyelashes are moistened with emotion.

The theatre over, Mr. George comes across the water again and makes his way to that curious region lying about the Haymarket and Leicester Square which is a centre of attraction to indifferent foreign hotels and indifferent foreigners, racket-courts, fighting-men, swordsmen, footguards, old china, gaming-houses, exhibitions, and a large medley of shabbiness and shrinking out of sight. Penetrating to the heart of this region, he arrives by a court and a long whitewashed passage at a great brick building composed of bare walls, floors, roof-rafters, and skylights, on the front of which, if it can be said to have any front, is painted GEORGE'S SHOOTING GALLERY, &c.

Into George's Shooting Gallery, &c., he goes; and in it there are gaslights (partly turned off now), and two whitened targets for rifle-shooting, and archery accommodation, and fencing appliances, and all necessaries for the British art of boxing. None of these sports or exercises being pursued in George's Shooting Gallery to-night, which is so devoid of company that a little grotesque man with a large head has it all to himself and lies asleep upon the floor.

The little man is dressed something like a gunsmith, in a green-baize apron and cap; and his face and hands are dirty with gunpowder and begrimed with the loading of guns. As he lies in the light before a glaring white target, the black upon him shines again. Not far off is the strong, rough, primitive table with a vice upon it at which he has been working. He is a little man with a face all crushed together, who appears, from a certain blue and speckled appearance that one of his cheeks presents, to have been blown up, in the way of business, at some odd time or times.

"Phil!" says the trooper in a quiet voice.

"All right!" cries Phil, scrambling to his feet.

"Anything been doing?"

"Flat as ever so much swipes," says Phil. "Five dozen rifle and a dozen

pistol. As to aim!” Phil gives a howl at the recollection.

“Shut up shop, Phil!”

As Phil moves about to execute this order, it appears that he is lame, though able to move very quickly. On the speckled side of his face he has no eyebrow, and on the other side he has a bushy black one, which want of uniformity gives him a very singular and rather sinister appearance. Everything seems to have happened to his hands that could possibly take place consistently with the retention of all the fingers, for they are notched, and seamed, and crumpled all over. He appears to be very strong and lifts heavy benches about as if he had no idea what weight was. He has a curious way of limping round the gallery with his shoulder against the wall and tacking off at objects he wants to lay hold of instead of going straight to them, which has left a smear all round the four walls, conventionally called “Phil’s mark.”

This custodian of George’s Gallery in George’s absence concludes his proceedings, when he has locked the great doors and turned out all the lights but one, which he leaves to glimmer, by dragging out from a wooden cabin in a corner two mattresses and bedding. These being drawn to opposite ends of the gallery, the trooper makes his own bed and Phil makes his.

“Phil!” says the master, walking towards him without his coat and waistcoat, and looking more soldierly than ever in his braces. “You were found in a doorway, weren’t you?”

“Gutter,” says Phil. “Watchman tumbled over me.”

“Then vagabondizing came natural to YOU from the beginning.”

“As nat’ral as possible,” says Phil.

“Good night!”

“Good night, guv’ner.”

Phil cannot even go straight to bed, but finds it necessary to shoulder round two sides of the gallery and then tack off at his mattress. The trooper, after taking a turn or two in the rifle-distance and looking up at the moon now shining through the skylights, strides to his own mattress by a shorter route and goes to bed too.

CHAPTER XXII

Mr. Bucket

ALLEGORY LOOKS PRETTY COOL in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, though the evening is hot, for both Mr. Tulkinghorn’s windows are wide open, and the room is lofty, gusty, and gloomy. These may not be desirable characteristics when November comes with fog and sleet or January with ice and snow, but they have their merits in the sultry long vacation weather. They enable Allegory, though it has cheeks like peaches, and knees like bunches of blossoms, and rosy swellings for calves to its legs and muscles to its arms, to look tolerably cool to-night.

Plenty of dust comes in at Mr. Tulkinghorn’s windows, and plenty more has generated among his furniture and papers. It lies thick everywhere. When a breeze from the country that has lost its way takes fright and makes a blind hurry to rush out again, it flings as much dust in the eyes of Allegory as the law—or Mr. Tulkinghorn, one of its trustiest representatives—may scatter, on occasion, in the eyes of the laity.

In his lowering magazine of dust, the universal article into which his papers and himself, and all his clients, and all things of earth, animate and inanimate, are resolving, Mr. Tulkinghorn sits at one of the open windows enjoying a bottle of old port. Though a hard-grained man, close, dry, and silent, he can enjoy old wine with the best. He has a priceless bin of port in some artful cellar under the Fields, which is one of his many secrets. When he dines alone in chambers, as he has dined to-day, and has his bit of fish and his steak or chicken brought in from the coffee-house, he descends with a candle to the echoing regions below the deserted mansion, and heralded by a remote reverberation of thundering doors, comes gravely back encircled by an earthy atmosphere and carrying a bottle from which he pours a radiant nectar, two score and ten years old, that blushes in the glass to find itself so famous and fills the whole room with the fragrance of southern grapes.

Mr. Tulkinghorn, sitting in the twilight by the open window, enjoys his

wine. As if it whispered to him of its fifty years of silence and seclusion, it shuts him up the closer. More impenetrable than ever, he sits, and drinks, and mellows as it were in secrecy, pondering at that twilight hour on all the mysteries he knows, associated with darkening woods in the country, and vast blank shut-up houses in town, and perhaps sparing a thought or two for himself, and his family history, and his money, and his will—all a mystery to every one—and that one bachelor friend of his, a man of the same mould and a lawyer too, who lived the same kind of life until he was seventy-five years old, and then suddenly conceiving (as it is supposed) an impression that it was too monotonous, gave his gold watch to his hair-dresser one summer evening and walked leisurely home to the Temple and hanged himself.

But Mr. Tulkinghorn is not alone to-night to ponder at his usual length. Seated at the same table, though with his chair modestly and uncomfortably drawn a little way from it, sits a bald, mild, shining man who coughs respectfully behind his hand when the lawyer bids him fill his glass.

“Now, Snagsby,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn, “to go over this odd story again.”

“If you please, sir.”

“You told me when you were so good as to step round here last night—”

“For which I must ask you to excuse me if it was a liberty, sir; but I remember that you had taken a sort of an interest in that person, and I thought it possible that you might—just—wish—to—”

Mr. Tulkinghorn is not the man to help him to any conclusion or to admit anything as to any possibility concerning himself. So Mr. Snagsby trails off into saying, with an awkward cough, “I must ask you to excuse the liberty, sir, I am sure.”

“Not at all,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn. “You told me, Snagsby, that you put on your hat and came round without mentioning your intention to your wife. That was prudent I think, because it’s not a matter of such importance that it requires to be mentioned.”

“Well, sir,” returns Mr. Snagsby, “you see, my little woman is—not to put too fine a point upon it—inquisitive. She’s inquisitive. Poor little thing, she’s liable to spasms, and it’s good for her to have her mind employed. In consequence of which she employs it—I should say upon every individual thing she can lay hold of, whether it concerns her or not—especially not.

My little woman has a very active mind, sir."

Mr. Snagsby drinks and murmurs with an admiring cough behind his hand, "Dear me, very fine wine indeed!"

"Therefore you kept your visit to yourself last night?" says Mr. Tulkinghorn. "And to-night too?"

"Yes, sir, and to-night, too. My little woman is at present in—not to put too fine a point on it—in a pious state, or in what she considers such, and attends the Evening Exertions (which is the name they go by) of a reverend party of the name of Chadband. He has a great deal of eloquence at his command, undoubtedly, but I am not quite favourable to his style myself. That's neither here nor there. My little woman being engaged in that way made it easier for me to step round in a quiet manner."

Mr. Tulkinghorn assents. "Fill your glass, Snagsby."

"Thank you, sir, I am sure," returns the stationer with his cough of deference. "This is wonderfully fine wine, sir!"

"It is a rare wine now," says Mr. Tulkinghorn. "It is fifty years old."

"Is it indeed, sir? But I am not surprised to hear it, I am sure. It might be —any age almost." After rendering this general tribute to the port, Mr. Snagsby in his modesty coughs an apology behind his hand for drinking anything so precious.

"Will you run over, once again, what the boy said?" asks Mr. Tulkinghorn, putting his hands into the pockets of his rusty smallclothes and leaning quietly back in his chair.

"With pleasure, sir."

Then, with fidelity, though with some prolixity, the law-stationer repeats Jo's statement made to the assembled guests at his house. On coming to the end of his narrative, he gives a great start and breaks off with, "Dear me, sir, I wasn't aware there was any other gentleman present!"

Mr. Snagsby is dismayed to see, standing with an attentive face between himself and the lawyer at a little distance from the table, a person with a hat and stick in his hand who was not there when he himself came in and has not since entered by the door or by either of the windows. There is a press in the room, but its hinges have not creaked, nor has a step been audible upon the floor. Yet this third person stands there with his attentive face, and his hat and stick in his hands, and his hands behind him, a composed and quiet listener. He is a stoutly built, steady-looking, sharp-eyed man in black,

of about the middle-age. Except that he looks at Mr. Snagsby as if he were going to take his portrait, there is nothing remarkable about him at first sight but his ghostly manner of appearing.

“Don’t mind this gentleman,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn in his quiet way. “This is only Mr. Bucket.”

“Oh, indeed, sir?” returns the stationer, expressing by a cough that he is quite in the dark as to who Mr. Bucket may be.

“I wanted him to hear this story,” says the lawyer, “because I have half a mind (for a reason) to know more of it, and he is very intelligent in such things. What do you say to this, Bucket?”

“It’s very plain, sir. Since our people have moved this boy on, and he’s not to be found on his old lay, if Mr. Snagsby don’t object to go down with me to Tom-all-Alone’s and point him out, we can have him here in less than a couple of hours’ time. I can do it without Mr. Snagsby, of course, but this is the shortest way.”

“Mr. Bucket is a detective officer, Snagsby,” says the lawyer in explanation.

“Is he indeed, sir?” says Mr. Snagsby with a strong tendency in his clump of hair to stand on end.

“And if you have no real objection to accompany Mr. Bucket to the place in question,” pursues the lawyer, “I shall feel obliged to you if you will do so.”

In a moment’s hesitation on the part of Mr. Snagsby, Bucket dips down to the bottom of his mind.

“Don’t you be afraid of hurting the boy,” he says. “You won’t do that. It’s all right as far as the boy’s concerned. We shall only bring him here to ask him a question or so I want to put to him, and he’ll be paid for his trouble and sent away again. It’ll be a good job for him. I promise you, as a man, that you shall see the boy sent away all right. Don’t you be afraid of hurting him; you an’t going to do that.”

“Very well, Mr. Tulkinghorn!” cries Mr. Snagsby cheerfully. And reassured, “Since that’s the case—”

“Yes! And lookee here, Mr. Snagsby,” resumes Bucket, taking him aside by the arm, tapping him familiarly on the breast, and speaking in a confidential tone. “You’re a man of the world, you know, and a man of business, and a man of sense. That’s what YOU are.”

“I am sure I am much obliged to you for your good opinion,” returns the stationer with his cough of modesty, “but—”

“That’s what YOU are, you know,” says Bucket. “Now, it an’t necessary to say to a man like you, engaged in your business, which is a business of trust and requires a person to be wide awake and have his senses about him and his head screwed on tight (I had an uncle in your business once)—it an’t necessary to say to a man like you that it’s the best and wisest way to keep little matters like this quiet. Don’t you see? Quiet!”

“Certainly, certainly,” returns the other.

“I don’t mind telling YOU,” says Bucket with an engaging appearance of frankness, “that as far as I can understand it, there seems to be a doubt whether this dead person wasn’t entitled to a little property, and whether this female hasn’t been up to some games respecting that property, don’t you see?”

“Oh!” says Mr. Snagsby, but not appearing to see quite distinctly.

“Now, what YOU want,” pursues Bucket, again tapping Mr. Snagsby on the breast in a comfortable and soothing manner, “is that every person should have their rights according to justice. That’s what YOU want.”

“To be sure,” returns Mr. Snagsby with a nod.

“On account of which, and at the same time to oblige a—do you call it, in your business, customer or client? I forget how my uncle used to call it.”

“Why, I generally say customer myself,” replies Mr. Snagsby.

“You’re right!” returns Mr. Bucket, shaking hands with him quite affectionately. “—On account of which, and at the same time to oblige a real good customer, you mean to go down with me, in confidence, to Tom-all-Alone’s and to keep the whole thing quiet ever afterwards and never mention it to any one. That’s about your intentions, if I understand you?”

“You are right, sir. You are right,” says Mr. Snagsby.

“Then here’s your hat,” returns his new friend, quite as intimate with it as if he had made it; “and if you’re ready, I am.”

They leave Mr. Tulkinghorn, without a ruffle on the surface of his unfathomable depths, drinking his old wine, and go down into the streets.

“You don’t happen to know a very good sort of person of the name of Gridley, do you?” says Bucket in friendly converse as they descend the stairs.

“No,” says Mr. Snagsby, considering, “I don’t know anybody of that

name. Why?”

“Nothing particular,” says Bucket; “only having allowed his temper to get a little the better of him and having been threatening some respectable people, he is keeping out of the way of a warrant I have got against him—which it’s a pity that a man of sense should do.”

As they walk along, Mr. Snagsby observes, as a novelty, that however quick their pace may be, his companion still seems in some undefinable manner to lurk and lounge; also, that whenever he is going to turn to the right or left, he pretends to have a fixed purpose in his mind of going straight ahead, and wheels off, sharply, at the very last moment. Now and then, when they pass a police-constable on his beat, Mr. Snagsby notices that both the constable and his guide fall into a deep abstraction as they come towards each other, and appear entirely to overlook each other, and to gaze into space. In a few instances, Mr. Bucket, coming behind some under-sized young man with a shining hat on, and his sleek hair twisted into one flat curl on each side of his head, almost without glancing at him touches him with his stick, upon which the young man, looking round, instantly evaporates. For the most part Mr. Bucket notices things in general, with a face as unchanging as the great mourning ring on his little finger or the brooch, composed of not much diamond and a good deal of setting, which he wears in his shirt.

When they come at last to Tom-all-Alone’s, Mr. Bucket stops for a moment at the corner and takes a lighted bull’s-eye from the constable on duty there, who then accompanies him with his own particular bull’s-eye at his waist. Between his two conductors, Mr. Snagsby passes along the middle of a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water—though the roads are dry elsewhere—and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses. Branching from this street and its heaps of ruins are other streets and courts so infamous that Mr. Snagsby sickens in body and mind and feels as if he were going every moment deeper down into the infernal gulf.

“Draw off a bit here, Mr. Snagsby,” says Bucket as a kind of shabby palanquin is borne towards them, surrounded by a noisy crowd. “Here’s the fever coming up the street!”

As the unseen wretch goes by, the crowd, leaving that object of

attraction, hovers round the three visitors like a dream of horrible faces and fades away up alleys and into ruins and behind walls, and with occasional cries and shrill whistles of warning, thenceforth flits about them until they leave the place.

"Are those the fever-houses, Darby?" Mr. Bucket coolly asks as he turns his bull's-eye on a line of stinking ruins.

Darby replies that "all them are," and further that in all, for months and months, the people "have been down by dozens" and have been carried out dead and dying "like sheep with the rot." Bucket observing to Mr. Snagsby as they go on again that he looks a little poorly, Mr. Snagsby answers that he feels as if he couldn't breathe the dreadful air.

There is inquiry made at various houses for a boy named Jo. As few people are known in Tom-all-Alone's by any Christian sign, there is much reference to Mr. Snagsby whether he means Carrots, or the Colonel, or Gallows, or Young Chisel, or Terrier Tip, or Lanky, or the Brick. Mr. Snagsby describes over and over again. There are conflicting opinions respecting the original of his picture. Some think it must be Carrots, some say the Brick. The Colonel is produced, but is not at all near the thing. Whenever Mr. Snagsby and his conductors are stationary, the crowd flows round, and from its squalid depths obsequious advice heaves up to Mr. Bucket. Whenever they move, and the angry bull's-eyes glare, it fades away and flits about them up the alleys, and in the ruins, and behind the walls, as before.

At last there is a lair found out where Toughy, or the Tough Subject, lays him down at night; and it is thought that the Tough Subject may be Jo. Comparison of notes between Mr. Snagsby and the proprietress of the house —a drunken face tied up in a black bundle, and flaring out of a heap of rags on the floor of a dog-hutch which is her private apartment—leads to the establishment of this conclusion. Toughy has gone to the doctor's to get a bottle of stuff for a sick woman but will be here anon.

"And who have we got here to-night?" says Mr. Bucket, opening another door and glaring in with his bull's-eye. "Two drunken men, eh? And two women? The men are sound enough," turning back each sleeper's arm from his face to look at him. "Are these your good men, my dears?"

"Yes, sir," returns one of the women. "They are our husbands."

"Brickmakers, eh?"

“Yes, sir.”

“What are you doing here? You don’t belong to London.”

“No, sir. We belong to Hertfordshire.”

“Whereabouts in Hertfordshire?”

“Saint Albans.”

“Come up on the tramp?”

“We walked up yesterday. There’s no work down with us at present, but we have done no good by coming here, and shall do none, I expect.”

“That’s not the way to do much good,” says Mr. Bucket, turning his head in the direction of the unconscious figures on the ground.

“It an’t indeed,” replies the woman with a sigh. “Jenny and me knows it full well.”

The room, though two or three feet higher than the door, is so low that the head of the tallest of the visitors would touch the blackened ceiling if he stood upright. It is offensive to every sense; even the gross candle burns pale and sickly in the polluted air. There are a couple of benches and a higher bench by way of table. The men lie asleep where they stumbled down, but the women sit by the candle. Lying in the arms of the woman who has spoken is a very young child.

“Why, what age do you call that little creature?” says Bucket. “It looks as if it was born yesterday.” He is not at all rough about it; and as he turns his light gently on the infant, Mr. Snagsby is strangely reminded of another infant, encircled with light, that he has seen in pictures.

“He is not three weeks old yet, sir,” says the woman.

“Is he your child?”

“Mine.”

The other woman, who was bending over it when they came in, stoops down again and kisses it as it lies asleep.

“You seem as fond of it as if you were the mother yourself,” says Mr. Bucket.

“I was the mother of one like it, master, and it died.”

“Ah, Jenny, Jenny!” says the other woman to her. “Better so. Much better to think of dead than alive, Jenny! Much better!”

“Why, you an’t such an unnatural woman, I hope,” returns Bucket sternly, “as to wish your own child dead?”

“God knows you are right, master,” she returns. “I am not. I’d stand

between it and death with my own life if I could, as true as any pretty lady."

"Then don't talk in that wrong manner," says Mr. Bucket, mollified again. "Why do you do it?"

"It's brought into my head, master," returns the woman, her eyes filling with tears, "when I look down at the child lying so. If it was never to wake no more, you'd think me mad, I should take on so. I know that very well. I was with Jenny when she lost hers—warn't I, Jenny?—and I know how she grieved. But look around you at this place. Look at them," glancing at the sleepers on the ground. "Look at the boy you're waiting for, who's gone out to do me a good turn. Think of the children that your business lays with often and often, and that YOU see grow up!"

"Well, well," says Mr. Bucket, "you train him respectable, and he'll be a comfort to you, and look after you in your old age, you know."

"I mean to try hard," she answers, wiping her eyes. "But I have been a-thinking, being over-tired to-night and not well with the ague, of all the many things that'll come in his way. My master will be against it, and he'll be beat, and see me beat, and made to fear his home, and perhaps to stray wild. If I work for him ever so much, and ever so hard, there's no one to help me; and if he should be turned bad 'spite of all I could do, and the time should come when I should sit by him in his sleep, made hard and changed, an't it likely I should think of him as he lies in my lap now and wish he had died as Jenny's child died!"

"There, there!" says Jenny. "Liz, you're tired and ill. Let me take him."

In doing so, she displaces the mother's dress, but quickly readjusts it over the wounded and bruised bosom where the baby has been lying.

"It's my dead child," says Jenny, walking up and down as she nurses, "that makes me love this child so dear, and it's my dead child that makes her love it so dear too, as even to think of its being taken away from her now. While she thinks that, I think what fortune would I give to have my darling back. But we mean the same thing, if we knew how to say it, us two mothers does in our poor hearts!"

As Mr. Snagsby blows his nose and coughs his cough of sympathy, a step is heard without. Mr. Bucket throws his light into the doorway and says to Mr. Snagsby, "Now, what do you say to Toughy? Will HE do?"

"That's Jo," says Mr. Snagsby.

Jo stands amazed in the disk of light, like a ragged figure in a magic-

lantern, trembling to think that he has offended against the law in not having moved on far enough. Mr. Snagsby, however, giving him the consolatory assurance, “It’s only a job you will be paid for, Jo,” he recovers; and on being taken outside by Mr. Bucket for a little private confabulation, tells his tale satisfactorily, though out of breath.

“I have squared it with the lad,” says Mr. Bucket, returning, “and it’s all right. Now, Mr. Snagsby, we’re ready for you.”

First, Jo has to complete his errand of good nature by handing over the physic he has been to get, which he delivers with the laconic verbal direction that “it’s to be all took d’rectly.” Secondly, Mr. Snagsby has to lay upon the table half a crown, his usual panacea for an immense variety of afflictions. Thirdly, Mr. Bucket has to take Jo by the arm a little above the elbow and walk him on before him, without which observance neither the Tough Subject nor any other Subject could be professionally conducted to Lincoln’s Inn Fields. These arrangements completed, they give the women good night and come out once more into black and foul Tom-all-Alone’s.

By the noisome ways through which they descended into that pit, they gradually emerge from it, the crowd flitting, and whistling, and skulking about them until they come to the verge, where restoration of the bull’s-eyes is made to Darby. Here the crowd, like a concourse of imprisoned demons, turns back, yelling, and is seen no more. Through the clearer and fresher streets, never so clear and fresh to Mr. Snagsby’s mind as now, they walk and ride until they come to Mr. Tulkinghorn’s gate.

As they ascend the dim stairs (Mr. Tulkinghorn’s chambers being on the first floor), Mr. Bucket mentions that he has the key of the outer door in his pocket and that there is no need to ring. For a man so expert in most things of that kind, Bucket takes time to open the door and makes some noise too. It may be that he sounds a note of preparation.

Howbeit, they come at last into the hall, where a lamp is burning, and so into Mr. Tulkinghorn’s usual room—the room where he drank his old wine to-night. He is not there, but his two old-fashioned candlesticks are, and the room is tolerably light.

Mr. Bucket, still having his professional hold of Jo and appearing to Mr. Snagsby to possess an unlimited number of eyes, makes a little way into this room, when Jo starts and stops.

“What’s the matter?” says Bucket in a whisper.

“There she is!” cries Jo.

“Who!”

“The lady!”

A female figure, closely veiled, stands in the middle of the room, where the light falls upon it. It is quite still and silent. The front of the figure is towards them, but it takes no notice of their entrance and remains like a statue.

“Now, tell me,” says Bucket aloud, “how you know that to be the lady.”

“I know the wale,” replies Jo, staring, “and the bonnet, and the gownd.”

“Be quite sure of what you say, Tough,” returns Bucket, narrowly observant of him. “Look again.”

“I am a-looking as hard as ever I can look,” says Jo with starting eyes, “and that there’s the wale, the bonnet, and the gownd.”

“What about those rings you told me of?” asks Bucket.

“A-sparkling all over here,” says Jo, rubbing the fingers of his left hand on the knuckles of his right without taking his eyes from the figure.

The figure removes the right-hand glove and shows the hand.

“Now, what do you say to that?” asks Bucket.

Jo shakes his head. “Not rings a bit like them. Not a hand like that.”

“What are you talking of?” says Bucket, evidently pleased though, and well pleased too.

“Hand was a deal whiter, a deal delicater, and a deal smaller,” returns Jo.

“Why, you’ll tell me I’m my own mother next,” says Mr. Bucket. “Do you recollect the lady’s voice?”

“I think I does,” says Jo.

The figure speaks. “Was it at all like this? I will speak as long as you like if you are not sure. Was it this voice, or at all like this voice?”

Jo looks aghast at Mr. Bucket. “Not a bit!”

“Then, what,” retorts that worthy, pointing to the figure, “did you say it was the lady for?”

“Cos,” says Jo with a perplexed stare but without being at all shaken in his certainty, “cos that there’s the wale, the bonnet, and the gownd. It is her and it an’t her. It an’t her hand, nor yet her rings, nor yet her woice. But that there’s the wale, the bonnet, and the gownd, and they’re wore the same way wot she wore ’em, and it’s her height wot she wos, and she giv me a sov’ring and hooked it.”

“Well!” says Mr. Bucket slightly, “we haven’t got much good out of YOU. But, however, here’s five shillings for you. Take care how you spend it, and don’t get yourself into trouble.” Bucket stealthily tells the coins from one hand into the other like counters—which is a way he has, his principal use of them being in these games of skill—and then puts them, in a little pile, into the boy’s hand and takes him out to the door, leaving Mr. Snagsby, not by any means comfortable under these mysterious circumstances, alone with the veiled figure. But on Mr. Tulkinghorn’s coming into the room, the veil is raised and a sufficiently good-looking Frenchwoman is revealed, though her expression is something of the intensest.

“Thank you, Mademoiselle Hortense,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn with his usual equanimity. “I will give you no further trouble about this little wager.”

“You will do me the kindness to remember, sir, that I am not at present placed?” says mademoiselle.

“Certainly, certainly!”

“And to confer upon me the favour of your distinguished recommendation?”

“By all means, Mademoiselle Hortense.”

“A word from Mr. Tulkinghorn is so powerful.”

“It shall not be wanting, mademoiselle.”

“Receive the assurance of my devoted gratitude, dear sir.”

“Good night.”

Mademoiselle goes out with an air of native gentility; and Mr. Bucket, to whom it is, on an emergency, as natural to be groom of the ceremonies as it is to be anything else, shows her downstairs, not without gallantry.

“Well, Bucket?” quoth Mr. Tulkinghorn on his return.

“It’s all squared, you see, as I squared it myself, sir. There an’t a doubt that it was the other one with this one’s dress on. The boy was exact respecting colours and everything. Mr. Snagsby, I promised you as a man that he should be sent away all right. Don’t say it wasn’t done!”

“You have kept your word, sir,” returns the stationer; “and if I can be of no further use, Mr. Tulkinghorn, I think, as my little woman will be getting anxious—”

“Thank you, Snagsby, no further use,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn. “I am quite indebted to you for the trouble you have taken already.”

“Not at all, sir. I wish you good night.”

“You see, Mr. Snagsby,” says Mr. Bucket, accompanying him to the door and shaking hands with him over and over again, “what I like in you is that you’re a man it’s of no use pumping; that’s what YOU are. When you know you have done a right thing, you put it away, and it’s done with and gone, and there’s an end of it. That’s what YOU do.”

“That is certainly what I endeavour to do, sir,” returns Mr. Snagsby.

“No, you don’t do yourself justice. It an’t what you endeavour to do,” says Mr. Bucket, shaking hands with him and blessing him in the tenderest manner, “it’s what you DO. That’s what I estimate in a man in your way of business.”

Mr. Snagsby makes a suitable response and goes homeward so confused by the events of the evening that he is doubtful of his being awake and out —doubtful of the reality of the streets through which he goes—doubtful of the reality of the moon that shines above him. He is presently reassured on these subjects by the unchallengeable reality of Mrs. Snagsby, sitting up with her head in a perfect beehive of curl-papers and night-cap, who has dispatched Guster to the police-station with official intelligence of her husband’s being made away with, and who within the last two hours has passed through every stage of swooning with the greatest decorum. But as the little woman feelingly says, many thanks she gets for it!

CHAPTER XXIII

Esther’s Narrative

WE CAME HOME FROM Mr. Boythorn’s after six pleasant weeks. We were often in the park and in the woods and seldom passed the lodge where we had taken shelter without looking in to speak to the keeper’s wife; but we saw no more of Lady Dedlock, except at church on Sundays. There was company at Chesney Wold; and although several beautiful faces surrounded her, her face retained the same influence on me as at first. I do not quite know even now whether it was painful or pleasurable, whether it drew me towards her or made me shrink from her. I think I admired her with a kind of fear, and I know that in her presence my thoughts always wandered back, as they had done at first, to that old time of my life.

I had a fancy, on more than one of these Sundays, that what this lady so curiously was to me, I was to her—I mean that I disturbed her thoughts as she influenced mine, though in some different way. But when I stole a glance at her and saw her so composed and distant and unapproachable, I felt this to be a foolish weakness. Indeed, I felt the whole state of my mind in reference to her to be weak and unreasonable, and I remonstrated with myself about it as much as I could.

One incident that occurred before we quitted Mr. Boythorn’s house, I had better mention in this place.

I was walking in the garden with Ada when I was told that some one wished to see me. Going into the breakfast-room where this person was waiting, I found it to be the French maid who had cast off her shoes and walked through the wet grass on the day when it thundered and lightened.

“Mademoiselle,” she began, looking fixedly at me with her too-eager eyes, though otherwise presenting an agreeable appearance and speaking neither with boldness nor servility, “I have taken a great liberty in coming here, but you know how to excuse it, being so amiable, mademoiselle.”

“No excuse is necessary,” I returned, “if you wish to speak to me.”

“That is my desire, mademoiselle. A thousand thanks for the permission.

I have your leave to speak. Is it not?" she said in a quick, natural way.

"Certainly," said I.

"Mademoiselle, you are so amiable! Listen then, if you please. I have left my Lady. We could not agree. My Lady is so high, so very high. Pardon! Mademoiselle, you are right!" Her quickness anticipated what I might have said presently but as yet had only thought. "It is not for me to come here to complain of my Lady. But I say she is so high, so very high. I will not say a word more. All the world knows that."

"Go on, if you please," said I.

"Assuredly; mademoiselle, I am thankful for your politeness. Mademoiselle, I have an inexpressible desire to find service with a young lady who is good, accomplished, beautiful. You are good, accomplished, and beautiful as an angel. Ah, could I have the honour of being your domestic!"

"I am sorry—" I began.

"Do not dismiss me so soon, mademoiselle!" she said with an involuntary contraction of her fine black eyebrows. "Let me hope a moment! Mademoiselle, I know this service would be more retired than that which I have quitted. Well! I wish that. I know this service would be less distinguished than that which I have quitted. Well! I wish that, I know that I should win less, as to wages here. Good. I am content."

"I assure you," said I, quite embarrassed by the mere idea of having such an attendant, "that I keep no maid—"

"Ah, mademoiselle, but why not? Why not, when you can have one so devoted to you! Who would be enchanted to serve you; who would be so true, so zealous, and so faithful every day! Mademoiselle, I wish with all my heart to serve you. Do not speak of money at present. Take me as I am. For nothing!"

She was so singularly earnest that I drew back, almost afraid of her. Without appearing to notice it, in her ardour she still pressed herself upon me, speaking in a rapid subdued voice, though always with a certain grace and propriety.

"Mademoiselle, I come from the South country where we are quick and where we like and dislike very strong. My Lady was too high for me; I was too high for her. It is done—past—finished! Receive me as your domestic, and I will serve you well. I will do more for you than you figure to yourself

now. Chut! Mademoiselle, I will—no matter, I will do my utmost possible in all things. If you accept my service, you will not repent it. Mademoiselle, you will not repent it, and I will serve you well. You don't know how well!"

There was a lowering energy in her face as she stood looking at me while I explained the impossibility of my engaging her (without thinking it necessary to say how very little I desired to do so), which seemed to bring visibly before me some woman from the streets of Paris in the reign of terror.

She heard me out without interruption and then said with her pretty accent and in her mildest voice, "Hey, mademoiselle, I have received my answer! I am sorry of it. But I must go elsewhere and seek what I have not found here. Will you graciously let me kiss your hand?"

She looked at me more intently as she took it, and seemed to take note, with her momentary touch, of every vein in it. "I fear I surprised you, mademoiselle, on the day of the storm?" she said with a parting curtsy.

I confessed that she had surprised us all.

"I took an oath, mademoiselle," she said, smiling, "and I wanted to stamp it on my mind so that I might keep it faithfully. And I will! Adieu, mademoiselle!"

So ended our conference, which I was very glad to bring to a close. I supposed she went away from the village, for I saw her no more; and nothing else occurred to disturb our tranquil summer pleasures until six weeks were out and we returned home as I began just now by saying.

At that time, and for a good many weeks after that time, Richard was constant in his visits. Besides coming every Saturday or Sunday and remaining with us until Monday morning, he sometimes rode out on horseback unexpectedly and passed the evening with us and rode back again early next day. He was as vivacious as ever and told us he was very industrious, but I was not easy in my mind about him. It appeared to me that his industry was all misdirected. I could not find that it led to anything but the formation of delusive hopes in connexion with the suit already the pernicious cause of so much sorrow and ruin. He had got at the core of that mystery now, he told us, and nothing could be plainer than that the will under which he and Ada were to take I don't know how many thousands of pounds must be finally established if there were any sense or justice in the Court of Chancery—but oh, what a great IF that sounded in my ears—and

that this happy conclusion could not be much longer delayed. He proved this to himself by all the weary arguments on that side he had read, and every one of them sunk him deeper in the infatuation. He had even begun to haunt the court. He told us how he saw Miss Flite there daily, how they talked together, and how he did her little kindnesses, and how, while he laughed at her, he pitied her from his heart. But he never thought—never, my poor, dear, sanguine Richard, capable of so much happiness then, and with such better things before him—what a fatal link was riveting between his fresh youth and her faded age, between his free hopes and her caged birds, and her hungry garret, and her wandering mind.

Ada loved him too well to mistrust him much in anything he said or did, and my guardian, though he frequently complained of the east wind and read more than usual in the growlery, preserved a strict silence on the subject. So I thought one day when I went to London to meet Caddy Jellyby, at her solicitation, I would ask Richard to be in waiting for me at the coach-office, that we might have a little talk together. I found him there when I arrived, and we walked away arm in arm.

"Well, Richard," said I as soon as I could begin to be grave with him, "are you beginning to feel more settled now?"

"Oh, yes, my dear!" returned Richard. "I'm all right enough."

"But settled?" said I.

"How do you mean, settled?" returned Richard with his gay laugh.

"Settled in the law," said I.

"Oh, aye," replied Richard, "I'm all right enough."

"You said that before, my dear Richard."

"And you don't think it's an answer, eh? Well! Perhaps it's not. Settled? You mean, do I feel as if I were settling down?"

"Yes."

"Why, no, I can't say I am settling down," said Richard, strongly emphasizing "down," as if that expressed the difficulty, "because one can't settle down while this business remains in such an unsettled state. When I say this business, of course I mean the—forbidden subject."

"Do you think it will ever be in a settled state?" said I.

"Not the least doubt of it," answered Richard.

We walked a little way without speaking, and presently Richard addressed me in his frankest and most feeling manner, thus: "My dear

Esther, I understand you, and I wish to heaven I were a more constant sort of fellow. I don't mean constant to Ada, for I love her dearly—better and better every day—but constant to myself. (Somehow, I mean something that I can't very well express, but you'll make it out.) If I were a more constant sort of fellow, I should have held on either to Badger or to Kenge and Carboy like grim death, and should have begun to be steady and systematic by this time, and shouldn't be in debt, and—"

"ARE you in debt, Richard?"

"Yes," said Richard, "I am a little so, my dear. Also, I have taken rather too much to billiards and that sort of thing. Now the murder's out; you despise me, Esther, don't you?"

"You know I don't," said I.

"You are kinder to me than I often am to myself," he returned. "My dear Esther, I am a very unfortunate dog not to be more settled, but how CAN I be more settled? If you lived in an unfinished house, you couldn't settle down in it; if you were condemned to leave everything you undertook unfinished, you would find it hard to apply yourself to anything; and yet that's my unhappy case. I was born into this unfinished contention with all its chances and changes, and it began to unsettle me before I quite knew the difference between a suit at law and a suit of clothes; and it has gone on unsettling me ever since; and here I am now, conscious sometimes that I am but a worthless fellow to love my confiding cousin Ada."

We were in a solitary place, and he put his hands before his eyes and sobbed as he said the words.

"Oh, Richard!" said I. "Do not be so moved. You have a noble nature, and Ada's love may make you worthier every day."

"I know, my dear," he replied, pressing my arm, "I know all that. You mustn't mind my being a little soft now, for I have had all this upon my mind for a long time, and have often meant to speak to you, and have sometimes wanted opportunity and sometimes courage. I know what the thought of Ada ought to do for me, but it doesn't do it. I am too unsettled even for that. I love her most devotedly, and yet I do her wrong, in doing myself wrong, every day and hour. But it can't last for ever. We shall come on for a final hearing and get judgment in our favour, and then you and Ada shall see what I can really be!"

It had given me a pang to hear him sob and see the tears start out

between his fingers, but that was infinitely less affecting to me than the hopeful animation with which he said these words.

"I have looked well into the papers, Esther. I have been deep in them for months," he continued, recovering his cheerfulness in a moment, "and you may rely upon it that we shall come out triumphant. As to years of delay, there has been no want of them, heaven knows! And there is the greater probability of our bringing the matter to a speedy close; in fact, it's on the paper now. It will be all right at last, and then you shall see!"

Recalling how he had just now placed Messrs. Kenge and Carboy in the same category with Mr. Badger, I asked him when he intended to be articled in Lincoln's Inn.

"There again! I think not at all, Esther," he returned with an effort. "I fancy I have had enough of it. Having worked at Jarndyce and Jarndyce like a galley slave, I have slaked my thirst for the law and satisfied myself that I shouldn't like it. Besides, I find it unsettles me more and more to be so constantly upon the scene of action. So what," continued Richard, confident again by this time, "do I naturally turn my thoughts to?"

"I can't imagine," said I.

"Don't look so serious," returned Richard, "because it's the best thing I can do, my dear Esther, I am certain. It's not as if I wanted a profession for life. These proceedings will come to a termination, and then I am provided for. No. I look upon it as a pursuit which is in its nature more or less unsettled, and therefore suited to my temporary condition—I may say, precisely suited. What is it that I naturally turn my thoughts to?"

I looked at him and shook my head.

"What," said Richard, in a tone of perfect conviction, "but the army!"

"The army?" said I.

"The army, of course. What I have to do is to get a commission; and—there I am, you know!" said Richard.

And then he showed me, proved by elaborate calculations in his pocket-book, that supposing he had contracted, say, two hundred pounds of debt in six months out of the army; and that he contracted no debt at all within a corresponding period in the army—as to which he had quite made up his mind; this step must involve a saving of four hundred pounds in a year, or two thousand pounds in five years, which was a considerable sum. And then he spoke so ingenuously and sincerely of the sacrifice he made in

withdrawing himself for a time from Ada, and of the earnestness with which he aspired—as in thought he always did, I know full well—to repay her love, and to ensure her happiness, and to conquer what was amiss in himself, and to acquire the very soul of decision, that he made my heart ache keenly, sorely. For, I thought, how would this end, how could this end, when so soon and so surely all his manly qualities were touched by the fatal blight that ruined everything it rested on!

I spoke to Richard with all the earnestness I felt, and all the hope I could not quite feel then, and implored him for Ada's sake not to put any trust in Chancery. To all I said, Richard readily assented, riding over the court and everything else in his easy way and drawing the brightest pictures of the character he was to settle into—alas, when the grievous suit should loose its hold upon him! We had a long talk, but it always came back to that, in substance.

At last we came to Soho Square, where Caddy Jellyby had appointed to wait for me, as a quiet place in the neighbourhood of Newman Street. Caddy was in the garden in the centre and hurried out as soon as I appeared. After a few cheerful words, Richard left us together.

"Prince has a pupil over the way, Esther," said Caddy, "and got the key for us. So if you will walk round and round here with me, we can lock ourselves in and I can tell you comfortably what I wanted to see your dear good face about."

"Very well, my dear," said I. "Nothing could be better." So Caddy, after affectionately squeezing the dear good face as she called it, locked the gate, and took my arm, and we began to walk round the garden very cosily.

"You see, Esther," said Caddy, who thoroughly enjoyed a little confidence, "after you spoke to me about its being wrong to marry without Ma's knowledge, or even to keep Ma long in the dark respecting our engagement—though I don't believe Ma cares much for me, I must say—I thought it right to mention your opinions to Prince. In the first place because I want to profit by everything you tell me, and in the second place because I have no secrets from Prince."

"I hope he approved, Caddy?"

"Oh, my dear! I assure you he would approve of anything you could say. You have no idea what an opinion he has of you!"

"Indeed!"

“Esther, it’s enough to make anybody but me jealous,” said Caddy, laughing and shaking her head; “but it only makes me joyful, for you are the first friend I ever had, and the best friend I ever can have, and nobody can respect and love you too much to please me.”

“Upon my word, Caddy,” said I, “you are in the general conspiracy to keep me in a good humour. Well, my dear?”

“Well! I am going to tell you,” replied Caddy, crossing her hands confidentially upon my arm. “So we talked a good deal about it, and so I said to Prince, ‘Prince, as Miss Summerson—’”

“I hope you didn’t say ‘Miss Summerson’?”

“No. I didn’t!” cried Caddy, greatly pleased and with the brightest of faces. “I said, ‘Esther.’ I said to Prince, ‘As Esther is decidedly of that opinion, Prince, and has expressed it to me, and always hints it when she writes those kind notes, which you are so fond of hearing me read to you, I am prepared to disclose the truth to Ma whenever you think proper. And I think, Prince,’ said I, ‘that Esther thinks that I should be in a better, and truer, and more honourable position altogether if you did the same to your papa.’”

“Yes, my dear,” said I. “Esther certainly does think so.”

“So I was right, you see!” exclaimed Caddy. “Well! This troubled Prince a good deal, not because he had the least doubt about it, but because he is so considerate of the feelings of old Mr. Turveydrop; and he had his apprehensions that old Mr. Turveydrop might break his heart, or faint away, or be very much overcome in some affecting manner or other if he made such an announcement. He feared old Mr. Turveydrop might consider it undutiful and might receive too great a shock. For old Mr. Turveydrop’s deportment is very beautiful, you know, Esther,” said Caddy, “and his feelings are extremely sensitive.”

“Are they, my dear?”

“Oh, extremely sensitive. Prince says so. Now, this has caused my darling child—I didn’t mean to use the expression to you, Esther,” Caddy apologized, her face suffused with blushes, “but I generally call Prince my darling child.”

I laughed; and Caddy laughed and blushed, and went on.

“This has caused him, Esther—”

“Caused whom, my dear?”

“Oh, you tiresome thing!” said Caddy, laughing, with her pretty face on fire. “My darling child, if you insist upon it! This has caused him weeks of uneasiness and has made him delay, from day to day, in a very anxious manner. At last he said to me, ‘Caddy, if Miss Summerson, who is a great favourite with my father, could be prevailed upon to be present when I broke the subject, I think I could do it.’ So I promised I would ask you. And I made up my mind, besides,” said Caddy, looking at me hopefully but timidly, “that if you consented, I would ask you afterwards to come with me to Ma. This is what I meant when I said in my note that I had a great favour and a great assistance to beg of you. And if you thought you could grant it, Esther, we should both be very grateful.”

“Let me see, Caddy,” said I, pretending to consider. “Really, I think I could do a greater thing than that if the need were pressing. I am at your service and the darling child’s, my dear, whenever you like.”

Caddy was quite transported by this reply of mine, being, I believe, as susceptible to the least kindness or encouragement as any tender heart that ever beat in this world; and after another turn or two round the garden, during which she put on an entirely new pair of gloves and made herself as resplendent as possible that she might do no avoidable discredit to the Master of Deportment, we went to Newman Street direct.

Prince was teaching, of course. We found him engaged with a not very hopeful pupil—a stubborn little girl with a sulky forehead, a deep voice, and an inanimate, dissatisfied mama—whose case was certainly not rendered more hopeful by the confusion into which we threw her preceptor. The lesson at last came to an end, after proceeding as discordantly as possible; and when the little girl had changed her shoes and had had her white muslin extinguished in shawls, she was taken away. After a few words of preparation, we then went in search of Mr. Turveydrop, whom we found, grouped with his hat and gloves, as a model of deportment, on the sofa in his private apartment—the only comfortable room in the house. He appeared to have dressed at his leisure in the intervals of a light collation, and his dressing-case, brushes, and so forth, all of quite an elegant kind, lay about.

“Father, Miss Summerson; Miss Jellyby.”

“Charmed! Enchanted!” said Mr. Turveydrop, rising with his high-shouldered bow. “Permit me!” Handing chairs. “Be seated!” Kissing the

tips of his left fingers. “Overjoyed!” Shutting his eyes and rolling. “My little retreat is made a paradise.” Recomposing himself on the sofa like the second gentleman in Europe.

“Again you find us, Miss Summerson,” said he, “using our little arts to polish, polish! Again the sex stimulates us and rewards us by the condescension of its lovely presence. It is much in these times (and we have made an awfully degenerating business of it since the days of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent—my patron, if I may presume to say so) to experience that deportment is not wholly trodden under foot by mechanics. That it can yet bask in the smile of beauty, my dear madam.”

I said nothing, which I thought a suitable reply; and he took a pinch of snuff.

“My dear son,” said Mr. Turveydrop, “you have four schools this afternoon. I would recommend a hasty sandwich.”

“Thank you, father,” returned Prince, “I will be sure to be punctual. My dear father, may I beg you to prepare your mind for what I am going to say?”

“Good heaven!” exclaimed the model, pale and aghast as Prince and Caddy, hand in hand, bent down before him. “What is this? Is this lunacy! Or what is this?”

“Father,” returned Prince with great submission, “I love this young lady, and we are engaged.”

“Engaged!” cried Mr. Turveydrop, reclining on the sofa and shutting out the sight with his hand. “An arrow launched at my brain by my own child!”

“We have been engaged for some time, father,” faltered Prince, “and Miss Summerson, hearing of it, advised that we should declare the fact to you and was so very kind as to attend on the present occasion. Miss Jellyby is a young lady who deeply respects you, father.”

Mr. Turveydrop uttered a groan.

“No, pray don’t! Pray don’t, father,” urged his son. “Miss Jellyby is a young lady who deeply respects you, and our first desire is to consider your comfort.”

Mr. Turveydrop sobbed.

“No, pray don’t, father!” cried his son.

“Boy,” said Mr. Turveydrop, “it is well that your sainted mother is spared this pang. Strike deep, and spare not. Strike home, sir, strike home!”

“Pray don’t say so, father,” implored Prince, in tears. “It goes to my heart. I do assure you, father, that our first wish and intention is to consider your comfort. Caroline and I do not forget our duty—what is my duty is Caroline’s, as we have often said together—and with your approval and consent, father, we will devote ourselves to making your life agreeable.”

“Strike home,” murmured Mr. Turveydrop. “Strike home!” But he seemed to listen, I thought, too.

“My dear father,” returned Prince, “we well know what little comforts you are accustomed to and have a right to, and it will always be our study and our pride to provide those before anything. If you will bless us with your approval and consent, father, we shall not think of being married until it is quite agreeable to you; and when we ARE married, we shall always make you—of course—our first consideration. You must ever be the head and master here, father; and we feel how truly unnatural it would be in us if we failed to know it or if we failed to exert ourselves in every possible way to please you.”

Mr. Turveydrop underwent a severe internal struggle and came upright on the sofa again with his cheeks puffing over his stiff cravat, a perfect model of parental deportment.

“My son!” said Mr. Turveydrop. “My children! I cannot resist your prayer. Be happy!”

His benignity as he raised his future daughter-in-law and stretched out his hand to his son (who kissed it with affectionate respect and gratitude) was the most confusing sight I ever saw.

“My children,” said Mr. Turveydrop, paternally encircling Caddy with his left arm as she sat beside him, and putting his right hand gracefully on his hip. “My son and daughter, your happiness shall be my care. I will watch over you. You shall always live with me”—meaning, of course, I will always live with you—“this house is henceforth as much yours as mine; consider it your home. May you long live to share it with me!”

The power of his deportment was such that they really were as much overcome with thankfulness as if, instead of quartering himself upon them for the rest of his life, he were making some munificent sacrifice in their favour.

“For myself, my children,” said Mr. Turveydrop, “I am falling into the sear and yellow leaf, and it is impossible to say how long the last feeble

traces of gentlemanly deportment may linger in this weaving and spinning age. But, so long, I will do my duty to society and will show myself, as usual, about town. My wants are few and simple. My little apartment here, my few essentials for the toilet, my frugal morning meal, and my little dinner will suffice. I charge your dutiful affection with the supply of these requirements, and I charge myself with all the rest."

They were overpowered afresh by his uncommon generosity.

"My son," said Mr. Turveydrop, "for those little points in which you are deficient—points of deportment, which are born with a man, which may be improved by cultivation, but can never be originated—you may still rely on me. I have been faithful to my post since the days of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, and I will not desert it now. No, my son. If you have ever contemplated your father's poor position with a feeling of pride, you may rest assured that he will do nothing to tarnish it. For yourself, Prince, whose character is different (we cannot be all alike, nor is it advisable that we should), work, be industrious, earn money, and extend the connexion as much as possible."

"That you may depend I will do, dear father, with all my heart," replied Prince.

"I have no doubt of it," said Mr. Turveydrop. "Your qualities are not shining, my dear child, but they are steady and useful. And to both of you, my children, I would merely observe, in the spirit of a sainted wooman on whose path I had the happiness of casting, I believe, SOME ray of light, take care of the establishment, take care of my simple wants, and bless you both!"

Old Mr. Turveydrop then became so very gallant, in honour of the occasion, that I told Caddy we must really go to Thavies Inn at once if we were to go at all that day. So we took our departure after a very loving farewell between Caddy and her betrothed, and during our walk she was so happy and so full of old Mr. Turveydrop's praises that I would not have said a word in his disparagement for any consideration.

The house in Thavies Inn had bills in the windows announcing that it was to let, and it looked dirtier and gloomier and ghastlier than ever. The name of poor Mr. Jellyby had appeared in the list of bankrupts but a day or two before, and he was shut up in the dining-room with two gentlemen and a heap of blue bags, account-books, and papers, making the most desperate

endeavours to understand his affairs. They appeared to me to be quite beyond his comprehension, for when Caddy took me into the dining-room by mistake and we came upon Mr. Jellyby in his spectacles, forlornly fenced into a corner by the great dining-table and the two gentlemen, he seemed to have given up the whole thing and to be speechless and insensible.

Going upstairs to Mrs. Jellyby's room (the children were all screaming in the kitchen, and there was no servant to be seen), we found that lady in the midst of a voluminous correspondence, opening, reading, and sorting letters, with a great accumulation of torn covers on the floor. She was so preoccupied that at first she did not know me, though she sat looking at me with that curious, bright-eyed, far-off look of hers.

"Ah! Miss Summerson!" she said at last. "I was thinking of something so different! I hope you are well. I am happy to see you. Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Clare quite well?"

I hoped in return that Mr. Jellyby was quite well.

"Why, not quite, my dear," said Mrs. Jellyby in the calmest manner. "He has been unfortunate in his affairs and is a little out of spirits. Happily for me, I am so much engaged that I have no time to think about it. We have, at the present moment, one hundred and seventy families, Miss Summerson, averaging five persons in each, either gone or going to the left bank of the Niger."

I thought of the one family so near us who were neither gone nor going to the left bank of the Niger, and wondered how she could be so placid.

"You have brought Caddy back, I see," observed Mrs. Jellyby with a glance at her daughter. "It has become quite a novelty to see her here. She has almost deserted her old employment and in fact obliges me to employ a boy."

"I am sure, Ma—" began Caddy.

"Now you know, Caddy," her mother mildly interposed, "that I DO employ a boy, who is now at his dinner. What is the use of your contradicting?"

"I was not going to contradict, Ma," returned Caddy. "I was only going to say that surely you wouldn't have me be a mere drudge all my life."

"I believe, my dear," said Mrs. Jellyby, still opening her letters, casting her bright eyes smilingly over them, and sorting them as she spoke, "that

you have a business example before you in your mother. Besides. A mere drudge? If you had any sympathy with the destinies of the human race, it would raise you high above any such idea. But you have none. I have often told you, Caddy, you have no such sympathy."

"Not if it's Africa, Ma, I have not."

"Of course you have not. Now, if I were not happily so much engaged, Miss Summerson," said Mrs. Jellyby, sweetly casting her eyes for a moment on me and considering where to put the particular letter she had just opened, "this would distress and disappoint me. But I have so much to think of, in connexion with Borrioboola-Gha and it is so necessary I should concentrate myself that there is my remedy, you see."

As Caddy gave me a glance of entreaty, and as Mrs. Jellyby was looking far away into Africa straight through my bonnet and head, I thought it a good opportunity to come to the subject of my visit and to attract Mrs. Jellyby's attention.

"Perhaps," I began, "you will wonder what has brought me here to interrupt you."

"I am always delighted to see Miss Summerson," said Mrs. Jellyby, pursuing her employment with a placid smile. "Though I wish," and she shook her head, "she was more interested in the Borrioboolan project."

"I have come with Caddy," said I, "because Caddy justly thinks she ought not to have a secret from her mother and fancies I shall encourage and aid her (though I am sure I don't know how) in imparting one."

"Caddy," said Mrs. Jellyby, pausing for a moment in her occupation and then serenely pursuing it after shaking her head, "you are going to tell me some nonsense."

Caddy untied the strings of her bonnet, took her bonnet off, and letting it dangle on the floor by the strings, and crying heartily, said, "Ma, I am engaged."

"Oh, you ridiculous child!" observed Mrs. Jellyby with an abstracted air as she looked over the dispatch last opened; "what a goose you are!"

"I am engaged, Ma," sobbed Caddy, "to young Mr. Turveydrop, at the academy; and old Mr. Turveydrop (who is a very gentlemanly man indeed) has given his consent, and I beg and pray you'll give us yours, Ma, because I never could be happy without it. I never, never could!" sobbed Caddy, quite forgetful of her general complainings and of everything but her

natural affection.

“You see again, Miss Summerson,” observed Mrs. Jellyby serenely, “what a happiness it is to be so much occupied as I am and to have this necessity for self-concentration that I have. Here is Caddy engaged to a dancing-master’s son—mixed up with people who have no more sympathy with the destinies of the human race than she has herself! This, too, when Mr. Quale, one of the first philanthropists of our time, has mentioned to me that he was really disposed to be interested in her!”

“Ma, I always hated and detested Mr. Quale!” sobbed Caddy.

“Caddy, Caddy!” returned Mrs. Jellyby, opening another letter with the greatest complacency. “I have no doubt you did. How could you do otherwise, being totally destitute of the sympathies with which he overflows! Now, if my public duties were not a favourite child to me, if I were not occupied with large measures on a vast scale, these petty details might grieve me very much, Miss Summerson. But can I permit the film of a silly proceeding on the part of Caddy (from whom I expect nothing else) to interpose between me and the great African continent? No. No,” repeated Mrs. Jellyby in a calm clear voice, and with an agreeable smile, as she opened more letters and sorted them. “No, indeed.”

I was so unprepared for the perfect coolness of this reception, though I might have expected it, that I did not know what to say. Caddy seemed equally at a loss. Mrs. Jellyby continued to open and sort letters and to repeat occasionally in quite a charming tone of voice and with a smile of perfect composure, “No, indeed.”

“I hope, Ma,” sobbed poor Caddy at last, “you are not angry?”

“Oh, Caddy, you really are an absurd girl,” returned Mrs. Jellyby, “to ask such questions after what I have said of the preoccupation of my mind.”

“And I hope, Ma, you give us your consent and wish us well?” said Caddy.

“You are a nonsensical child to have done anything of this kind,” said Mrs. Jellyby; “and a degenerate child, when you might have devoted yourself to the great public measure. But the step is taken, and I have engaged a boy, and there is no more to be said. Now, pray, Caddy,” said Mrs. Jellyby, for Caddy was kissing her, “don’t delay me in my work, but let me clear off this heavy batch of papers before the afternoon post comes in!”

I thought I could not do better than take my leave; I was detained for a moment by Caddy's saying, "You won't object to my bringing him to see you, Ma?"

"Oh, dear me, Caddy," cried Mrs. Jellyby, who had relapsed into that distant contemplation, "have you begun again? Bring whom?"

"Him, Ma."

"Caddy, Caddy!" said Mrs. Jellyby, quite weary of such little matters. "Then you must bring him some evening which is not a Parent Society night, or a Branch night, or a Ramification night. You must accommodate the visit to the demands upon my time. My dear Miss Summerson, it was very kind of you to come here to help out this silly chit. Good-bye! When I tell you that I have fifty-eight new letters from manufacturing families anxious to understand the details of the native and coffee-cultivation question this morning, I need not apologize for having very little leisure."

I was not surprised by Caddy's being in low spirits when we went downstairs, or by her sobbing afresh on my neck, or by her saying she would far rather have been scolded than treated with such indifference, or by her confiding to me that she was so poor in clothes that how she was ever to be married creditably she didn't know. I gradually cheered her up by dwelling on the many things she would do for her unfortunate father and for Peepy when she had a home of her own; and finally we went downstairs into the damp dark kitchen, where Peepy and his little brothers and sisters were grovelling on the stone floor and where we had such a game of play with them that to prevent myself from being quite torn to pieces I was obliged to fall back on my fairy-tales. From time to time I heard loud voices in the parlour overhead, and occasionally a violent tumbling about of the furniture. The last effect I am afraid was caused by poor Mr. Jellyby's breaking away from the dining-table and making rushes at the window with the intention of throwing himself into the area whenever he made any new attempt to understand his affairs.

As I rode quietly home at night after the day's bustle, I thought a good deal of Caddy's engagement and felt confirmed in my hopes (in spite of the elder Mr. Turveydrop) that she would be the happier and better for it. And if there seemed to be but a slender chance of her and her husband ever finding out what the model of deportment really was, why that was all for the best too, and who would wish them to be wiser? I did not wish them to be any

wiser and indeed was half ashamed of not entirely believing in him myself. And I looked up at the stars, and thought about travellers in distant countries and the stars THEY saw, and hoped I might always be so blest and happy as to be useful to some one in my small way.

They were so glad to see me when I got home, as they always were, that I could have sat down and cried for joy if that had not been a method of making myself disagreeable. Everybody in the house, from the lowest to the highest, showed me such a bright face of welcome, and spoke so cheerily, and was so happy to do anything for me, that I suppose there never was such a fortunate little creature in the world.

We got into such a chatty state that night, through Ada and my guardian drawing me out to tell them all about Caddy, that I went on prose, prose, prosing for a length of time. At last I got up to my own room, quite red to think how I had been holding forth, and then I heard a soft tap at my door. So I said, “Come in!” and there came in a pretty little girl, neatly dressed in mourning, who dropped a curtsy.

“If you please, miss,” said the little girl in a soft voice, “I am Charley.”

“Why, so you are,” said I, stooping down in astonishment and giving her a kiss. “How glad am I to see you, Charley!”

“If you please, miss,” pursued Charley in the same soft voice, “I’m your maid.”

“Charley?”

“If you please, miss, I’m a present to you, with Mr. Jarndyce’s love.”

I sat down with my hand on Charley’s neck and looked at Charley.

“And oh, miss,” says Charley, clapping her hands, with the tears starting down her dimpled cheeks, “Tom’s at school, if you please, and learning so good! And little Emma, she’s with Mrs. Blinder, miss, a-being took such care of! And Tom, he would have been at school—and Emma, she would have been left with Mrs. Blinder—and me, I should have been here—all a deal sooner, miss; only Mr. Jarndyce thought that Tom and Emma and me had better get a little used to parting first, we was so small. Don’t cry, if you please, miss!”

“I can’t help it, Charley.”

“No, miss, nor I can’t help it,” says Charley. “And if you please, miss, Mr. Jarndyce’s love, and he thinks you’ll like to teach me now and then. And if you please, Tom and Emma and me is to see each other once a

month. And I’m so happy and so thankful, miss,” cried Charley with a heaving heart, “and I’ll try to be such a good maid!”

“Oh, Charley dear, never forget who did all this!”

“No, miss, I never will. Nor Tom won’t. Nor yet Emma. It was all you, miss.”

“I have known nothing of it. It was Mr. Jarndyce, Charley.”

“Yes, miss, but it was all done for the love of you and that you might be my mistress. If you please, miss, I am a little present with his love, and it was all done for the love of you. Me and Tom was to be sure to remember it.”

Charley dried her eyes and entered on her functions, going in her matronly little way about and about the room and folding up everything she could lay her hands upon. Presently Charley came creeping back to my side and said, “Oh, don’t cry, if you please, miss.”

And I said again, “I can’t help it, Charley.”

And Charley said again, “No, miss, nor I can’t help it.” And so, after all, I did cry for joy indeed, and so did she.

CHAPTER XXIV

An Appeal Case

AS SOON AS RICHARD and I had held the conversation of which I have given an account, Richard communicated the state of his mind to Mr. Jarndyce. I doubt if my guardian were altogether taken by surprise when he received the representation, though it caused him much uneasiness and disappointment. He and Richard were often closeted together, late at night and early in the morning, and passed whole days in London, and had innumerable appointments with Mr. Kenge, and laboured through a quantity of disagreeable business. While they were thus employed, my guardian, though he underwent considerable inconvenience from the state of the wind and rubbed his head so constantly that not a single hair upon it ever rested in its right place, was as genial with Ada and me as at any other time, but maintained a steady reserve on these matters. And as our utmost endeavours could only elicit from Richard himself sweeping assurances that everything was going on capitally and that it really was all right at last, our anxiety was not much relieved by him.

We learnt, however, as the time went on, that a new application was made to the Lord Chancellor on Richard's behalf as an infant and a ward, and I don't know what, and that there was a quantity of talking, and that the Lord Chancellor described him in open court as a vexatious and capricious infant, and that the matter was adjourned and readjourned, and referred, and reported on, and petitioned about until Richard began to doubt (as he told us) whether, if he entered the army at all, it would not be as a veteran of seventy or eighty years of age. At last an appointment was made for him to see the Lord Chancellor again in his private room, and there the Lord Chancellor very seriously reproved him for trifling with time and not knowing his mind—"a pretty good joke, I think," said Richard, "from that quarter!"—and at last it was settled that his application should be granted. His name was entered at the Horse Guards as an applicant for an ensign's commission; the purchase-money was deposited at an agent's; and Richard,

in his usual characteristic way, plunged into a violent course of military study and got up at five o’clock every morning to practise the broadsword exercise.

Thus, vacation succeeded term, and term succeeded vacation. We sometimes heard of Jarndyce and Jarndyce as being in the paper or out of the paper, or as being to be mentioned, or as being to be spoken to; and it came on, and it went off. Richard, who was now in a professor’s house in London, was able to be with us less frequently than before; my guardian still maintained the same reserve; and so time passed until the commission was obtained and Richard received directions with it to join a regiment in Ireland.

He arrived post-haste with the intelligence one evening, and had a long conference with my guardian. Upwards of an hour elapsed before my guardian put his head into the room where Ada and I were sitting and said, “Come in, my dears!” We went in and found Richard, whom we had last seen in high spirits, leaning on the chimney-piece looking mortified and angry.

“Rick and I, Ada,” said Mr. Jarndyce, “are not quite of one mind. Come, come, Rick, put a brighter face upon it!”

“You are very hard with me, sir,” said Richard. “The harder because you have been so considerate to me in all other respects and have done me kindnesses that I can never acknowledge. I never could have been set right without you, sir.”

“Well, well!” said Mr. Jarndyce. “I want to set you more right yet. I want to set you more right with yourself.”

“I hope you will excuse my saying, sir,” returned Richard in a fiery way, but yet respectfully, “that I think I am the best judge about myself.”

“I hope you will excuse my saying, my dear Rick,” observed Mr. Jarndyce with the sweetest cheerfulness and good humour, “that it’s quite natural in you to think so, but I don’t think so. I must do my duty, Rick, or you could never care for me in cool blood; and I hope you will always care for me, cool and hot.”

Ada had turned so pale that he made her sit down in his reading-chair and sat beside her.

“It’s nothing, my dear,” he said, “it’s nothing. Rick and I have only had a friendly difference, which we must state to you, for you are the theme. Now

you are afraid of what's coming."

"I am not indeed, cousin John," replied Ada with a smile, "if it is to come from you."

"Thank you, my dear. Do you give me a minute's calm attention, without looking at Rick. And, little woman, do you likewise. My dear girl," putting his hand on hers as it lay on the side of the easy-chair, "you recollect the talk we had, we four when the little woman told me of a little love affair?"

"It is not likely that either Richard or I can ever forget your kindness that day, cousin John."

"I can never forget it," said Richard.

"And I can never forget it," said Ada.

"So much the easier what I have to say, and so much the easier for us to agree," returned my guardian, his face irradiated by the gentleness and honour of his heart. "Ada, my bird, you should know that Rick has now chosen his profession for the last time. All that he has of certainty will be expended when he is fully equipped. He has exhausted his resources and is bound henceforward to the tree he has planted."

"Quite true that I have exhausted my present resources, and I am quite content to know it. But what I have of certainty, sir," said Richard, "is not all I have."

"Rick, Rick!" cried my guardian with a sudden terror in his manner, and in an altered voice, and putting up his hands as if he would have stopped his ears. "For the love of God, don't found a hope or expectation on the family curse! Whatever you do on this side the grave, never give one lingering glance towards the horrible phantom that has haunted us so many years. Better to borrow, better to beg, better to die!"

We were all startled by the fervour of this warning. Richard bit his lip and held his breath, and glanced at me as if he felt, and knew that I felt too, how much he needed it.

"Ada, my dear," said Mr. Jarndyce, recovering his cheerfulness, "these are strong words of advice, but I live in Bleak House and have seen a sight here. Enough of that. All Richard had to start him in the race of life is ventured. I recommend to him and you, for his sake and your own, that he should depart from us with the understanding that there is no sort of contract between you. I must go further. I will be plain with you both. You were to confide freely in me, and I will confide freely in you. I ask you

wholly to relinquish, for the present, any tie but your relationship."

"Better to say at once, sir," returned Richard, "that you renounce all confidence in me and that you advise Ada to do the same."

"Better to say nothing of the sort, Rick, because I don't mean it."

"You think I have begun ill, sir," retorted Richard. "I HAVE, I know."

"How I hoped you would begin, and how go on, I told you when we spoke of these things last," said Mr. Jarndyce in a cordial and encouraging manner. "You have not made that beginning yet, but there is a time for all things, and yours is not gone by; rather, it is just now fully come. Make a clear beginning altogether. You two (very young, my dears) are cousins. As yet, you are nothing more. What more may come must come of being worked out, Rick, and no sooner."

"You are very hard with me, sir," said Richard. "Harder than I could have supposed you would be."

"My dear boy," said Mr. Jarndyce, "I am harder with myself when I do anything that gives you pain. You have your remedy in your own hands. Ada, it is better for him that he should be free and that there should be no youthful engagement between you. Rick, it is better for her, much better; you owe it to her. Come! Each of you will do what is best for the other, if not what is best for yourselves."

"Why is it best, sir?" returned Richard hastily. "It was not when we opened our hearts to you. You did not say so then."

"I have had experience since. I don't blame you, Rick, but I have had experience since."

"You mean of me, sir."

"Well! Yes, of both of you," said Mr. Jarndyce kindly. "The time is not come for your standing pledged to one another. It is not right, and I must not recognize it. Come, come, my young cousins, begin afresh! Bygones shall be bygones, and a new page turned for you to write your lives in."

Richard gave an anxious glance at Ada but said nothing.

"I have avoided saying one word to either of you or to Esther," said Mr. Jarndyce, "until now, in order that we might be open as the day, and all on equal terms. I now affectionately advise, I now most earnestly entreat, you two to part as you came here. Leave all else to time, truth, and steadfastness. If you do otherwise, you will do wrong, and you will have made me do wrong in ever bringing you together."

A long silence succeeded.

"Cousin Richard," said Ada then, raising her blue eyes tenderly to his face, "after what our cousin John has said, I think no choice is left us. Your mind may be quite at ease about me, for you will leave me here under his care and will be sure that I can have nothing to wish for—quite sure if I guide myself by his advice. I—I don't doubt, cousin Richard," said Ada, a little confused, "that you are very fond of me, and I—I don't think you will fall in love with anybody else. But I should like you to consider well about it too, as I should like you to be in all things very happy. You may trust in me, cousin Richard. I am not at all changeable; but I am not unreasonable, and should never blame you. Even cousins may be sorry to part; and in truth I am very, very sorry, Richard, though I know it's for your welfare. I shall always think of you affectionately, and often talk of you with Esther, and—and perhaps you will sometimes think a little of me, cousin Richard. So now," said Ada, going up to him and giving him her trembling hand, "we are only cousins again, Richard—for the time perhaps—and I pray for a blessing on my dear cousin, wherever he goes!"

It was strange to me that Richard should not be able to forgive my guardian for entertaining the very same opinion of him which he himself had expressed of himself in much stronger terms to me. But it was certainly the case. I observed with great regret that from this hour he never was as free and open with Mr. Jarndyce as he had been before. He had every reason given him to be so, but he was not; and solely on his side, an estrangement began to arise between them.

In the business of preparation and equipment he soon lost himself, and even his grief at parting from Ada, who remained in Hertfordshire while he, Mr. Jarndyce, and I went up to London for a week. He remembered her by fits and starts, even with bursts of tears, and at such times would confide to me the heaviest self-reproaches. But in a few minutes he would recklessly conjure up some undefinable means by which they were both to be made rich and happy for ever, and would become as gay as possible.

It was a busy time, and I trotted about with him all day long, buying a variety of things of which he stood in need. Of the things he would have bought if he had been left to his own ways I say nothing. He was perfectly confidential with me, and often talked so sensibly and feelingly about his faults and his vigorous resolutions, and dwelt so much upon the

encouragement he derived from these conversations that I could never have been tired if I had tried.

There used, in that week, to come backward and forward to our lodging to fence with Richard a person who had formerly been a cavalry soldier; he was a fine bluff-looking man, of a frank free bearing, with whom Richard had practised for some months. I heard so much about him, not only from Richard, but from my guardian too, that I was purposely in the room with my work one morning after breakfast when he came.

"Good morning, Mr. George," said my guardian, who happened to be alone with me. "Mr. Carstone will be here directly. Meanwhile, Miss Summerson is very happy to see you, I know. Sit down."

He sat down, a little disconcerted by my presence, I thought, and without looking at me, drew his heavy sunburnt hand across and across his upper lip.

"You are as punctual as the sun," said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Military time, sir," he replied. "Force of habit. A mere habit in me, sir. I am not at all business-like."

"Yet you have a large establishment, too, I am told?" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Not much of a one, sir. I keep a shooting gallery, but not much of a one."

"And what kind of a shot and what kind of a swordsman do you make of Mr. Carstone?" said my guardian.

"Pretty good, sir," he replied, folding his arms upon his broad chest and looking very large. "If Mr. Carstone was to give his full mind to it, he would come out very good."

"But he don't, I suppose?" said my guardian.

"He did at first, sir, but not afterwards. Not his full mind. Perhaps he has something else upon it—some young lady, perhaps." His bright dark eyes glanced at me for the first time.

"He has not me upon his mind, I assure you, Mr. George," said I, laughing, "though you seem to suspect me."

He reddened a little through his brown and made me a trooper's bow. "No offence, I hope, miss. I am one of the roughs."

"Not at all," said I. "I take it as a compliment."

If he had not looked at me before, he looked at me now in three or four quick successive glances. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said to my guardian

with a manly kind of diffidence, “but you did me the honour to mention the young lady’s name—”

“Miss Summerson.”

“Miss Summerson,” he repeated, and looked at me again.

“Do you know the name?” I asked.

“No, miss. To my knowledge I never heard it. I thought I had seen you somewhere.”

“I think not,” I returned, raising my head from my work to look at him; and there was something so genuine in his speech and manner that I was glad of the opportunity. “I remember faces very well.”

“So do I, miss!” he returned, meeting my look with the fullness of his dark eyes and broad forehead. “Humph! What set me off, now, upon that!”

His once more reddening through his brown and being disconcerted by his efforts to remember the association brought my guardian to his relief.

“Have you many pupils, Mr. George?”

“They vary in their number, sir. Mostly they’re but a small lot to live by.”

“And what classes of chance people come to practise at your gallery?”

“All sorts, sir. Natives and foreigners. From gentlemen to ’prentices. I have had Frenchwomen come, before now, and show themselves dabs at pistol-shooting. Mad people out of number, of course, but THEY go everywhere where the doors stand open.”

“People don’t come with grudges and schemes of finishing their practice with live targets, I hope?” said my guardian, smiling.

“Not much of that, sir, though that HAS happened. Mostly they come for skill—or idleness. Six of one, and half-a-dozen of the other. I beg your pardon,” said Mr. George, sitting stiffly upright and squaring an elbow on each knee, “but I believe you’re a Chancery suitor, if I have heard correct?”

“I am sorry to say I am.”

“I have had one of YOUR compatriots in my time, sir.”

“A Chancery suitor?” returned my guardian. “How was that?”

“Why, the man was so badgered and worried and tortured by being knocked about from post to pillar, and from pillar to post,” said Mr. George, “that he got out of sorts. I don’t believe he had any idea of taking aim at anybody, but he was in that condition of resentment and violence that he would come and pay for fifty shots and fire away till he was red hot. One

day I said to him when there was nobody by and he had been talking to me angrily about his wrongs, ‘If this practice is a safety-valve, comrade, well and good; but I don’t altogether like your being so bent upon it in your present state of mind; I’d rather you took to something else.’ I was on my guard for a blow, he was that passionate; but he received it in very good part and left off directly. We shook hands and struck up a sort of friendship.”

“What was that man?” asked my guardian in a new tone of interest.

“Why, he began by being a small Shropshire farmer before they made a baited bull of him,” said Mr. George.

“Was his name Gridley?”

“It was, sir.”

Mr. George directed another succession of quick bright glances at me as my guardian and I exchanged a word or two of surprise at the coincidence, and I therefore explained to him how we knew the name. He made me another of his soldierly bows in acknowledgment of what he called my condescension.

“I don’t know,” he said as he looked at me, “what it is that sets me off again—but—bosh! What’s my head running against!” He passed one of his heavy hands over his crisp dark hair as if to sweep the broken thoughts out of his mind and sat a little forward, with one arm akimbo and the other resting on his leg, looking in a brown study at the ground.

“I am sorry to learn that the same state of mind has got this Gridley into new troubles and that he is in hiding,” said my guardian.

“So I am told, sir,” returned Mr. George, still musing and looking on the ground. “So I am told.”

“You don’t know where?”

“No, sir,” returned the trooper, lifting up his eyes and coming out of his reverie. “I can’t say anything about him. He will be worn out soon, I expect. You may file a strong man’s heart away for a good many years, but it will tell all of a sudden at last.”

Richard’s entrance stopped the conversation. Mr. George rose, made me another of his soldierly bows, wished my guardian a good day, and strode heavily out of the room.

This was the morning of the day appointed for Richard’s departure. We had no more purchases to make now; I had completed all his packing early

in the afternoon; and our time was disengaged until night, when he was to go to Liverpool for Holyhead. Jarndyce and Jarndyce being again expected to come on that day, Richard proposed to me that we should go down to the court and hear what passed. As it was his last day, and he was eager to go, and I had never been there, I gave my consent and we walked down to Westminster, where the court was then sitting. We beguiled the way with arrangements concerning the letters that Richard was to write to me and the letters that I was to write to him and with a great many hopeful projects. My guardian knew where we were going and therefore was not with us.

When we came to the court, there was the Lord Chancellor—the same whom I had seen in his private room in Lincoln's Inn—sitting in great state and gravity on the bench, with the mace and seals on a red table below him and an immense flat nosegay, like a little garden, which scented the whole court. Below the table, again, was a long row of solicitors, with bundles of papers on the matting at their feet; and then there were the gentlemen of the bar in wigs and gowns—some awake and some asleep, and one talking, and nobody paying much attention to what he said. The Lord Chancellor leaned back in his very easy chair with his elbow on the cushioned arm and his forehead resting on his hand; some of those who were present dozed; some read the newspapers; some walked about or whispered in groups: all seemed perfectly at their ease, by no means in a hurry, very unconcerned, and extremely comfortable.

To see everything going on so smoothly and to think of the roughness of the suitors' lives and deaths; to see all that full dress and ceremony and to think of the waste, and want, and beggared misery it represented; to consider that while the sickness of hope deferred was raging in so many hearts this polite show went calmly on from day to day, and year to year, in such good order and composure; to behold the Lord Chancellor and the whole array of practitioners under him looking at one another and at the spectators as if nobody had ever heard that all over England the name in which they were assembled was a bitter jest, was held in universal horror, contempt, and indignation, was known for something so flagrant and bad that little short of a miracle could bring any good out of it to any one—this was so curious and self-contradictory to me, who had no experience of it, that it was at first incredible, and I could not comprehend it. I sat where Richard put me, and tried to listen, and looked about me; but there seemed

to be no reality in the whole scene except poor little Miss Flite, the madwoman, standing on a bench and nodding at it.

Miss Flite soon espied us and came to where we sat. She gave me a gracious welcome to her domain and indicated, with much gratification and pride, its principal attractions. Mr. Kenge also came to speak to us and did the honours of the place in much the same way, with the bland modesty of a proprietor. It was not a very good day for a visit, he said; he would have preferred the first day of term; but it was imposing, it was imposing.

When we had been there half an hour or so, the case in progress—if I may use a phrase so ridiculous in such a connexion—seemed to die out of its own vapidity, without coming, or being by anybody expected to come, to any result. The Lord Chancellor then threw down a bundle of papers from his desk to the gentlemen below him, and somebody said, “Jarndyce and Jarndyce.” Upon this there was a buzz, and a laugh, and a general withdrawal of the bystanders, and a bringing in of great heaps, and piles, and bags and bags full of papers.

I think it came on “for further directions”—about some bill of costs, to the best of my understanding, which was confused enough. But I counted twenty-three gentlemen in wigs who said they were “in it,” and none of them appeared to understand it much better than I. They chatted about it with the Lord Chancellor, and contradicted and explained among themselves, and some of them said it was this way, and some of them said it was that way, and some of them jocosely proposed to read huge volumes of affidavits, and there was more buzzing and laughing, and everybody concerned was in a state of idle entertainment, and nothing could be made of it by anybody. After an hour or so of this, and a good many speeches being begun and cut short, it was “referred back for the present,” as Mr. Kenge said, and the papers were bundled up again before the clerks had finished bringing them in.

I glanced at Richard on the termination of these hopeless proceedings and was shocked to see the worn look of his handsome young face. “It can’t last for ever, Dame Durden. Better luck next time!” was all he said.

I had seen Mr. Guppy bringing in papers and arranging them for Mr. Kenge; and he had seen me and made me a forlorn bow, which rendered me desirous to get out of the court. Richard had given me his arm and was taking me away when Mr. Guppy came up.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Carstone,” said he in a whisper, “and Miss Summerson’s also, but there’s a lady here, a friend of mine, who knows her and wishes to have the pleasure of shaking hands.” As he spoke, I saw before me, as if she had started into bodily shape from my remembrance, Mrs. Rachael of my godmother’s house.

“How do you do, Esther?” said she. “Do you recollect me?”

I gave her my hand and told her yes and that she was very little altered.

“I wonder you remember those times, Esther,” she returned with her old asperity. “They are changed now. Well! I am glad to see you, and glad you are not too proud to know me.” But indeed she seemed disappointed that I was not.

“Proud, Mrs. Rachael!” I remonstrated.

“I am married, Esther,” she returned, coldly correcting me, “and am Mrs. Chadband. Well! I wish you good day, and I hope you’ll do well.”

Mr. Guppy, who had been attentive to this short dialogue, heaved a sigh in my ear and elbowed his own and Mrs. Rachael’s way through the confused little crowd of people coming in and going out, which we were in the midst of and which the change in the business had brought together. Richard and I were making our way through it, and I was yet in the first chill of the late unexpected recognition when I saw, coming towards us, but not seeing us, no less a person than Mr. George. He made nothing of the people about him as he tramped on, staring over their heads into the body of the court.

“George!” said Richard as I called his attention to him.

“You are well met, sir,” he returned. “And you, miss. Could you point a person out for me, I want? I don’t understand these places.”

Turning as he spoke and making an easy way for us, he stopped when we were out of the press in a corner behind a great red curtain.

“There’s a little cracked old woman,” he began, “that—”

I put up my finger, for Miss Flite was close by me, having kept beside me all the time and having called the attention of several of her legal acquaintance to me (as I had overheard to my confusion) by whispering in their ears, “Hush! Fitz Jarndyce on my left!”

“Hem!” said Mr. George. “You remember, miss, that we passed some conversation on a certain man this morning? Gridley,” in a low whisper behind his hand.

“Yes,” said I.

“He is hiding at my place. I couldn’t mention it. Hadn’t his authority. He is on his last march, miss, and has a whim to see her. He says they can feel for one another, and she has been almost as good as a friend to him here. I came down to look for her, for when I sat by Gridley this afternoon, I seemed to hear the roll of the muffled drums.”

“Shall I tell her?” said I.

“Would you be so good?” he returned with a glance of something like apprehension at Miss Flite. “It’s a providence I met you, miss; I doubt if I should have known how to get on with that lady.” And he put one hand in his breast and stood upright in a martial attitude as I informed little Miss Flite, in her ear, of the purport of his kind errand.

“My angry friend from Shropshire! Almost as celebrated as myself!” she exclaimed. “Now really! My dear, I will wait upon him with the greatest pleasure.”

“He is living concealed at Mr. George’s,” said I. “Hush! This is Mr. George.”

“In—deed!” returned Miss Flite. “Very proud to have the honour! A military man, my dear. You know, a perfect general!” she whispered to me.

Poor Miss Flite deemed it necessary to be so courtly and polite, as a mark of her respect for the army, and to curtsy so very often that it was no easy matter to get her out of the court. When this was at last done, and addressing Mr. George as “General,” she gave him her arm, to the great entertainment of some idlers who were looking on, he was so discomposed and begged me so respectfully “not to desert him” that I could not make up my mind to do it, especially as Miss Flite was always tractable with me and as she too said, “Fitz Jarndyce, my dear, you will accompany us, of course.” As Richard seemed quite willing, and even anxious, that we should see them safely to their destination, we agreed to do so. And as Mr. George informed us that Gridley’s mind had run on Mr. Jarndyce all the afternoon after hearing of their interview in the morning, I wrote a hasty note in pencil to my guardian to say where we were gone and why. Mr. George sealed it at a coffee-house, that it might lead to no discovery, and we sent it off by a ticket-porter.

We then took a hackney-coach and drove away to the neighbourhood of Leicester Square. We walked through some narrow courts, for which Mr.

George apologized, and soon came to the shooting gallery, the door of which was closed. As he pulled a bell-handle which hung by a chain to the door-post, a very respectable old gentleman with grey hair, wearing spectacles, and dressed in a black spencer and gaiters and a broad-brimmed hat, and carrying a large gold-beaded cane, addressed him.

"I ask your pardon, my good friend," said he, "but is this George's Shooting Gallery?"

"It is, sir," returned Mr. George, glancing up at the great letters in which that inscription was painted on the whitewashed wall.

"Oh! To be sure!" said the old gentleman, following his eyes. "Thank you. Have you rung the bell?"

"My name is George, sir, and I have rung the bell."

"Oh, indeed?" said the old gentleman. "Your name is George? Then I am here as soon as you, you see. You came for me, no doubt?"

"No, sir. You have the advantage of me."

"Oh, indeed?" said the old gentleman. "Then it was your young man who came for me. I am a physician and was requested—five minutes ago—to come and visit a sick man at George's Shooting Gallery."

"The muffled drums," said Mr. George, turning to Richard and me and gravely shaking his head. "It's quite correct, sir. Will you please to walk in."

The door being at that moment opened by a very singular-looking little man in a green-baize cap and apron, whose face and hands and dress were blackened all over, we passed along a dreary passage into a large building with bare brick walls where there were targets, and guns, and swords, and other things of that kind. When we had all arrived here, the physician stopped, and taking off his hat, appeared to vanish by magic and to leave another and quite a different man in his place.

"Now lookee here, George," said the man, turning quickly round upon him and tapping him on the breast with a large forefinger. "You know me, and I know you. You're a man of the world, and I'm a man of the world. My name's Bucket, as you are aware, and I have got a peace-warrant against Gridley. You have kept him out of the way a long time, and you have been artful in it, and it does you credit."

Mr. George, looking hard at him, bit his lip and shook his head.

"Now, George," said the other, keeping close to him, "you're a sensible man and a well-conducted man; that's what YOU are, beyond a doubt. And

mind you, I don’t talk to you as a common character, because you have served your country and you know that when duty calls we must obey. Consequently you’re very far from wanting to give trouble. If I required assistance, you’d assist me; that’s what YOU’D do. Phil Squod, don’t you go a-sidling round the gallery like that”—the dirty little man was shuffling about with his shoulder against the wall, and his eyes on the intruder, in a manner that looked threatening—“because I know you and won’t have it.”

“Phil!” said Mr. George.

“Yes, guv’ner.”

“Be quiet.”

The little man, with a low growl, stood still.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Mr. Bucket, “you’ll excuse anything that may appear to be disagreeable in this, for my name’s Inspector Bucket of the Detective, and I have a duty to perform. George, I know where my man is because I was on the roof last night and saw him through the skylight, and you along with him. He is in there, you know,” pointing; “that’s where HE is—on a sofy. Now I must see my man, and I must tell my man to consider himself in custody; but you know me, and you know I don’t want to take any uncomfortable measures. You give me your word, as from one man to another (and an old soldier, mind you, likewise), that it’s honourable between us two, and I’ll accommodate you to the utmost of my power.”

“I give it,” was the reply. “But it wasn’t handsome in you, Mr. Bucket.”

“Gammon, George! Not handsome?” said Mr. Bucket, tapping him on his broad breast again and shaking hands with him. “I don’t say it wasn’t handsome in you to keep my man so close, do I? Be equally good-tempered to me, old boy! Old William Tell, Old Shaw, the Life Guardsman! Why, he’s a model of the whole British army in himself, ladies and gentlemen. I’d give a fifty-pun’ note to be such a figure of a man!”

The affair being brought to this head, Mr. George, after a little consideration, proposed to go in first to his comrade (as he called him), taking Miss Flite with him. Mr. Bucket agreeing, they went away to the further end of the gallery, leaving us sitting and standing by a table covered with guns. Mr. Bucket took this opportunity of entering into a little light conversation, asking me if I were afraid of fire-arms, as most young ladies were; asking Richard if he were a good shot; asking Phil Squod which he considered the best of those rifles and what it might be worth first-hand,

telling him in return that it was a pity he ever gave way to his temper, for he was naturally so amiable that he might have been a young woman, and making himself generally agreeable.

After a time he followed us to the further end of the gallery, and Richard and I were going quietly away when Mr. George came after us. He said that if we had no objection to see his comrade, he would take a visit from us very kindly. The words had hardly passed his lips when the bell was rung and my guardian appeared, “on the chance,” he slightly observed, “of being able to do any little thing for a poor fellow involved in the same misfortune as himself.” We all four went back together and went into the place where Gridley was.

It was a bare room, partitioned off from the gallery with unpainted wood. As the screening was not more than eight or ten feet high and only enclosed the sides, not the top, the rafters of the high gallery roof were overhead, and the skylight through which Mr. Bucket had looked down. The sun was low—near setting—and its light came redly in above, without descending to the ground. Upon a plain canvas-covered sofa lay the man from Shropshire, dressed much as we had seen him last, but so changed that at first I recognized no likeness in his colourless face to what I recollected.

He had been still writing in his hiding-place, and still dwelling on his grievances, hour after hour. A table and some shelves were covered with manuscript papers and with worn pens and a medley of such tokens. Touchingly and awfully drawn together, he and the little mad woman were side by side and, as it were, alone. She sat on a chair holding his hand, and none of us went close to them.

His voice had faded, with the old expression of his face, with his strength, with his anger, with his resistance to the wrongs that had at last subdued him. The faintest shadow of an object full of form and colour is such a picture of it as he was of the man from Shropshire whom we had spoken with before.

He inclined his head to Richard and me and spoke to my guardian.

“Mr. Jarndyce, it is very kind of you to come to see me. I am not long to be seen, I think. I am very glad to take your hand, sir. You are a good man, superior to injustice, and God knows I honour you.”

They shook hands earnestly, and my guardian said some words of comfort to him.

“It may seem strange to you, sir,” returned Gridley; “I should not have liked to see you if this had been the first time of our meeting. But you know I made a fight for it, you know I stood up with my single hand against them all, you know I told them the truth to the last, and told them what they were, and what they had done to me; so I don’t mind your seeing me, this wreck.”

“You have been courageous with them many and many a time,” returned my guardian.

“Sir, I have been,” with a faint smile. “I told you what would come of it when I ceased to be so, and see here! Look at us—look at us!” He drew the hand Miss Flite held through her arm and brought her something nearer to him.

“This ends it. Of all my old associations, of all my old pursuits and hopes, of all the living and the dead world, this one poor soul alone comes natural to me, and I am fit for. There is a tie of many suffering years between us two, and it is the only tie I ever had on earth that Chancery has not broken.”

“Accept my blessing, Gridley,” said Miss Flite in tears. “Accept my blessing!”

“I thought, boastfully, that they never could break my heart, Mr. Jarndyce. I was resolved that they should not. I did believe that I could, and would, charge them with being the mockery they were until I died of some bodily disorder. But I am worn out. How long I have been wearing out, I don’t know; I seemed to break down in an hour. I hope they may never come to hear of it. I hope everybody here will lead them to believe that I died defying them, consistently and perseveringly, as I did through so many years.”

Here Mr. Bucket, who was sitting in a corner by the door, good-naturedly offered such consolation as he could administer.

“Come, come!” he said from his corner. “Don’t go on in that way, Mr. Gridley. You are only a little low. We are all of us a little low sometimes. I am. Hold up, hold up! You’ll lose your temper with the whole round of ’em, again and again; and I shall take you on a score of warrants yet, if I have luck.”

He only shook his head.

“Don’t shake your head,” said Mr. Bucket. “Nod it; that’s what I want to see you do. Why, Lord bless your soul, what times we have had together!

Haven’t I seen you in the Fleet over and over again for contempt? Haven’t I come into court, twenty afternoons for no other purpose than to see you pin the Chancellor like a bull-dog? Don’t you remember when you first began to threaten the lawyers, and the peace was sworn against you two or three times a week? Ask the little old lady there; she has been always present. Hold up, Mr. Gridley, hold up, sir!”

“What are you going to do about him?” asked George in a low voice.

“I don’t know yet,” said Bucket in the same tone. Then resuming his encouragement, he pursued aloud: “Worn out, Mr. Gridley? After dodging me for all these weeks and forcing me to climb the roof here like a tom cat and to come to see you as a doctor? That ain’t like being worn out. I should think not! Now I tell you what you want. You want excitement, you know, to keep YOU up; that’s what YOU want. You’re used to it, and you can’t do without it. I couldn’t myself. Very well, then; here’s this warrant got by Mr. Tulkinghorn of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and backed into half-a-dozen counties since. What do you say to coming along with me, upon this warrant, and having a good angry argument before the magistrates? It’ll do you good; it’ll freshen you up and get you into training for another turn at the Chancellor. Give in? Why, I am surprised to hear a man of your energy talk of giving in. You mustn’t do that. You’re half the fun of the fair in the Court of Chancery. George, you lend Mr. Gridley a hand, and let’s see now whether he won’t be better up than down.”

“He is very weak,” said the trooper in a low voice.

“Is he?” returned Bucket anxiously. “I only want to rouse him. I don’t like to see an old acquaintance giving in like this. It would cheer him up more than anything if I could make him a little waxy with me. He’s welcome to drop into me, right and left, if he likes. I shall never take advantage of it.”

The roof rang with a scream from Miss Flite, which still rings in my ears.

“Oh, no, Gridley!” she cried as he fell heavily and calmly back from before her. “Not without my blessing. After so many years!”

The sun was down, the light had gradually stolen from the roof, and the shadow had crept upward. But to me the shadow of that pair, one living and one dead, fell heavier on Richard’s departure than the darkness of the darkest night. And through Richard’s farewell words I heard it echoed: “Of

all my old associations, of all my old pursuits and hopes, of all the living and the dead world, this one poor soul alone comes natural to me, and I am fit for. There is a tie of many suffering years between us two, and it is the only tie I ever had on earth that Chancery has not broken!”

CHAPTER XXV

Mrs. Snagsby Sees It All

THERE IS DISQUIETUDE IN Cook's Court, Cursitor Street. Black suspicion hides in that peaceful region. The mass of Cook's Courtiers are in their usual state of mind, no better and no worse; but Mr. Snagsby is changed, and his little woman knows it.

For Tom-all-Alone's and Lincoln's Inn Fields persist in harnessing themselves, a pair of ungovernable coursers, to the chariot of Mr. Snagsby's imagination; and Mr. Bucket drives; and the passengers are Jo and Mr. Tulkinghorn; and the complete equipage whirls though the law-stationery business at wild speed all round the clock. Even in the little front kitchen where the family meals are taken, it rattles away at a smoking pace from the dinner-table, when Mr. Snagsby pauses in carving the first slice of the leg of mutton baked with potatoes and stares at the kitchen wall.

Mr. Snagsby cannot make out what it is that he has had to do with. Something is wrong somewhere, but what something, what may come of it, to whom, when, and from which unthought of and unheard of quarter is the puzzle of his life. His remote impressions of the robes and coronets, the stars and garters, that sparkle through the surface-dust of Mr. Tulkinghorn's chambers; his veneration for the mysteries presided over by that best and closest of his customers, whom all the Inns of Court, all Chancery Lane, and all the legal neighbourhood agree to hold in awe; his remembrance of Detective Mr. Bucket with his forefinger and his confidential manner, impossible to be evaded or declined, persuade him that he is a party to some dangerous secret without knowing what it is. And it is the fearful peculiarity of this condition that, at any hour of his daily life, at any opening of the shop-door, at any pull of the bell, at any entrance of a messenger, or any delivery of a letter, the secret may take air and fire, explode, and blow up—Mr. Bucket only knows whom.

For which reason, whenever a man unknown comes into the shop (as many men unknown do) and says, "Is Mr. Snagsby in?" or words to that

innocent effect, Mr. Snagsby's heart knocks hard at his guilty breast. He undergoes so much from such inquiries that when they are made by boys he revenges himself by flipping at their ears over the counter and asking the young dogs what they mean by it and why they can't speak out at once? More impracticable men and boys persist in walking into Mr. Snagsby's sleep and terrifying him with unaccountable questions, so that often when the cock at the little dairy in Cursitor Street breaks out in his usual absurd way about the morning, Mr. Snagsby finds himself in a crisis of nightmare, with his little woman shaking him and saying "What's the matter with the man!"

The little woman herself is not the least item in his difficulty. To know that he is always keeping a secret from her, that he has under all circumstances to conceal and hold fast a tender double tooth, which her sharpness is ever ready to twist out of his head, gives Mr. Snagsby, in her dentistical presence, much of the air of a dog who has a reservation from his master and will look anywhere rather than meet his eye.

These various signs and tokens, marked by the little woman, are not lost upon her. They impel her to say, "Snagsby has something on his mind!" And thus suspicion gets into Cook's Court, Cursitor Street. From suspicion to jealousy, Mrs. Snagsby finds the road as natural and short as from Cook's Court to Chancery Lane. And thus jealousy gets into Cook's Court, Cursitor Street. Once there (and it was always lurking thereabout), it is very active and nimble in Mrs. Snagsby's breast, prompting her to nocturnal examinations of Mr. Snagsby's pockets; to secret perusals of Mr. Snagsby's letters; to private researches in the day book and ledger, till, cash-box, and iron safe; to watchings at windows, listenings behind doors, and a general putting of this and that together by the wrong end.

Mrs. Snagsby is so perpetually on the alert that the house becomes ghostly with creaking boards and rustling garments. The 'prentices think somebody may have been murdered there in bygone times. Guster holds certain loose atoms of an idea (picked up at Tooting, where they were found floating among the orphans) that there is buried money underneath the cellar, guarded by an old man with a white beard, who cannot get out for seven thousand years because he said the Lord's Prayer backwards.

"Who was Nimrod?" Mrs. Snagsby repeatedly inquires of herself. "Who was that lady—that creature? And who is that boy?" Now, Nimrod being as

dead as the mighty hunter whose name Mrs. Snagsby has appropriated, and the lady being unproducible, she directs her mental eye, for the present, with redoubled vigilance to the boy. “And who,” quoth Mrs. Snagsby for the thousand and first time, “is that boy? Who is that—!” And there Mrs. Snagsby is seized with an inspiration.

He has no respect for Mr. Chadband. No, to be sure, and he wouldn’t have, of course. Naturally he wouldn’t, under those contagious circumstances. He was invited and appointed by Mr. Chadband—why, Mrs. Snagsby heard it herself with her own ears!—to come back, and be told where he was to go, to be addressed by Mr. Chadband; and he never came! Why did he never come? Because he was told not to come. Who told him not to come? Who? Ha, ha! Mrs. Snagsby sees it all.

But happily (and Mrs. Snagsby tightly shakes her head and tightly smiles) that boy was met by Mr. Chadband yesterday in the streets; and that boy, as affording a subject which Mr. Chadband desires to improve for the spiritual delight of a select congregation, was seized by Mr. Chadband and threatened with being delivered over to the police unless he showed the reverend gentleman where he lived and unless he entered into, and fulfilled, an undertaking to appear in Cook’s Court to-morrow night, “to—mor—row—night,” Mrs. Snagsby repeats for mere emphasis with another tight smile and another tight shake of her head; and to-morrow night that boy will be here, and to-morrow night Mrs. Snagsby will have her eye upon him and upon some one else; and oh, you may walk a long while in your secret ways (says Mrs. Snagsby with haughtiness and scorn), but you can’t blind ME!

Mrs. Snagsby sounds no timbrel in anybody’s ears, but holds her purpose quietly, and keeps her counsel. To-morrow comes, the savoury preparations for the Oil Trade come, the evening comes. Comes Mr. Snagsby in his black coat; come the Chadbands; come (when the gorging vessel is replete) the ’prentices and Guster, to be edified; comes at last, with his slouching head, and his shuffle backward, and his shuffle forward, and his shuffle to the right, and his shuffle to the left, and his bit of fur cap in his muddy hand, which he picks as if it were some mangy bird he had caught and was plucking before eating raw, Jo, the very, very tough subject Mr. Chadband is to improve.

Mrs. Snagsby screws a watchful glance on Jo as he is brought into the little drawing-room by Guster. He looks at Mr. Snagsby the moment he

comes in. Aha! Why does he look at Mr. Snagsby? Mr. Snagsby looks at him. Why should he do that, but that Mrs. Snagsby sees it all? Why else should that look pass between them, why else should Mr. Snagsby be confused and cough a signal cough behind his hand? It is as clear as crystal that Mr. Snagsby is that boy's father.

"Peace, my friends," says Chadband, rising and wiping the oily exudations from his reverend visage. "Peace be with us! My friends, why with us? Because," with his fat smile, "it cannot be against us, because it must be for us; because it is not hardening, because it is softening; because it does not make war like the hawk, but comes home unto us like the dove. Therefore, my friends, peace be with us! My human boy, come forward!"

Stretching forth his flabby paw, Mr. Chadband lays the same on Jo's arm and considers where to station him. Jo, very doubtful of his reverend friend's intentions and not at all clear but that something practical and painful is going to be done to him, mutters, "You let me alone. I never said nothink to you. You let me alone."

"No, my young friend," says Chadband smoothly, "I will not let you alone. And why? Because I am a harvest-labourer, because I am a toiler and a moiler, because you are delivered over unto me and are become as a precious instrument in my hands. My friends, may I so employ this instrument as to use it to your advantage, to your profit, to your gain, to your welfare, to your enrichment! My young friend, sit upon this stool."

Jo, apparently possessed by an impression that the reverend gentleman wants to cut his hair, shields his head with both arms and is got into the required position with great difficulty and every possible manifestation of reluctance.

When he is at last adjusted like a lay-figure, Mr. Chadband, retiring behind the table, holds up his bear's-paw and says, "My friends!" This is the signal for a general settlement of the audience. The 'prentices giggle internally and nudge each other. Guster falls into a staring and vacant state, compounded of a stunned admiration of Mr. Chadband and pity for the friendless outcast whose condition touches her nearly. Mrs. Snagsby silently lays trains of gunpowder. Mrs. Chadband composes herself grimly by the fire and warms her knees, finding that sensation favourable to the reception of eloquence.

It happens that Mr. Chadband has a pulpit habit of fixing some member

of his congregation with his eye and fatly arguing his points with that particular person, who is understood to be expected to be moved to an occasional grunt, groan, gasp, or other audible expression of inward working, which expression of inward working, being echoed by some elderly lady in the next pew and so communicated like a game of forfeits through a circle of the more fermentable sinners present, serves the purpose of parliamentary cheering and gets Mr. Chadband's steam up. From mere force of habit, Mr. Chadband in saying "My friends!" has rested his eye on Mr. Snagsby and proceeds to make that ill-starred stationer, already sufficiently confused, the immediate recipient of his discourse.

"We have here among us, my friends," says Chadband, "a Gentile and a heathen, a dweller in the tents of Tom-all-Alone's and a mover-on upon the surface of the earth. We have here among us, my friends," and Mr. Chadband, untwisting the point with his dirty thumb-nail, bestows an oily smile on Mr. Snagsby, signifying that he will throw him an argumentative back-fall presently if he be not already down, "a brother and a boy. Devoid of parents, devoid of relations, devoid of flocks and herds, devoid of gold and silver and of precious stones. Now, my friends, why do I say he is devoid of these possessions? Why? Why is he?" Mr. Chadband states the question as if he were propounding an entirely new riddle of much ingenuity and merit to Mr. Snagsby and entreating him not to give it up.

Mr. Snagsby, greatly perplexed by the mysterious look he received just now from his little woman—at about the period when Mr. Chadband mentioned the word parents—is tempted into modestly remarking, "I don't know, I'm sure, sir." On which interruption Mrs. Chadband glares and Mrs. Snagsby says, "For shame!"

"I hear a voice," says Chadband; "is it a still small voice, my friends? I fear not, though I fain would hope so—"

"Ah—h!" from Mrs. Snagsby.

"Which says, 'I don't know.' Then I will tell you why. I say this brother present here among us is devoid of parents, devoid of relations, devoid of flocks and herds, devoid of gold, of silver, and of precious stones because he is devoid of the light that shines in upon some of us. What is that light? What is it? I ask you, what is that light?"

Mr. Chadband draws back his head and pauses, but Mr. Snagsby is not to be lured on to his destruction again. Mr. Chadband, leaning forward over

the table, pierces what he has got to follow directly into Mr. Snagsby with the thumb-nail already mentioned.

"It is," says Chadband, "the ray of rays, the sun of suns, the moon of moons, the star of stars. It is the light of Terewth."

Mr. Chadband draws himself up again and looks triumphantly at Mr. Snagsby as if he would be glad to know how he feels after that.

"Of Terewth," says Mr. Chadband, hitting him again. "Say not to me that it is NOT the lamp of lamps. I say to you it is. I say to you, a million of times over, it is. It is! I say to you that I will proclaim it to you, whether you like it or not; nay, that the less you like it, the more I will proclaim it to you. With a speaking-trumpet! I say to you that if you rear yourself against it, you shall fall, you shall be bruised, you shall be battered, you shall be flawed, you shall be smashed."

The present effect of this flight of oratory—much admired for its general power by Mr. Chadband's followers—being not only to make Mr. Chadband unpleasantly warm, but to represent the innocent Mr. Snagsby in the light of a determined enemy to virtue, with a forehead of brass and a heart of adamant, that unfortunate tradesman becomes yet more disconcerted and is in a very advanced state of low spirits and false position when Mr. Chadband accidentally finishes him.

"My friends," he resumes after dabbing his fat head for some time—and it smokes to such an extent that he seems to light his pocket-handkerchief at it, which smokes, too, after every dab—"to pursue the subject we are endeavouring with our lowly gifts to improve, let us in a spirit of love inquire what is that Terewth to which I have alluded. For, my young friends," suddenly addressing the 'prentices and Guster, to their consternation, "if I am told by the doctor that calomel or castor-oil is good for me, I may naturally ask what is calomel, and what is castor-oil. I may wish to be informed of that before I dose myself with either or with both. Now, my young friends, what is this Terewth then? Firstly (in a spirit of love), what is the common sort of Terewth—the working clothes—the every-day wear, my young friends? Is it deception?"

"Ah—h!" from Mrs. Snagsby.

"Is it suppression?"

A shiver in the negative from Mrs. Snagsby.

"Is it reservation?"

A shake of the head from Mrs. Snagsby—very long and very tight.

"No, my friends, it is neither of these. Neither of these names belongs to it. When this young heathen now among us—who is now, my friends, asleep, the seal of indifference and perdition being set upon his eyelids; but do not wake him, for it is right that I should have to wrestle, and to combat and to struggle, and to conquer, for his sake—when this young hardened heathen told us a story of a cock, and of a bull, and of a lady, and of a sovereign, was THAT the Terewth? No. Or if it was partly, was it wholly and entirely? No, my friends, no!"

If Mr. Snagsby could withstand his little woman's look as it enters at his eyes, the windows of his soul, and searches the whole tenement, he were other than the man he is. He cowers and droops.

"Or, my juvenile friends," says Chadband, descending to the level of their comprehension with a very obtrusive demonstration in his greasily meek smile of coming a long way downstairs for the purpose, "if the master of this house was to go forth into the city and there see an eel, and was to come back, and was to call unto him the mistress of this house, and was to say, 'Sarah, rejoice with me, for I have seen an elephant!' would THAT be Terewth?"

Mrs. Snagsby in tears.

"Or put it, my juvenile friends, that he saw an elephant, and returning said 'Lo, the city is barren, I have seen but an eel,' would THAT be Terewth?"

Mrs. Snagsby sobbing loudly.

"Or put it, my juvenile friends," said Chadband, stimulated by the sound, "that the unnatural parents of this slumbering heathen—for parents he had, my juvenile friends, beyond a doubt—after casting him forth to the wolves and the vultures, and the wild dogs and the young gazelles, and the serpents, went back to their dwellings and had their pipes, and their pots, and their flutings and their dancings, and their malt liquors, and their butcher's meat and poultry, would THAT be Terewth?"

Mrs. Snagsby replies by delivering herself a prey to spasms, not an unresisting prey, but a crying and a tearing one, so that Cook's Court re-echoes with her shrieks. Finally, becoming cataleptic, she has to be carried up the narrow staircase like a grand piano. After unspeakable suffering, productive of the utmost consternation, she is pronounced, by expresses

from the bedroom, free from pain, though much exhausted, in which state of affairs Mr. Snagsby, trampled and crushed in the piano-forte removal, and extremely timid and feeble, ventures to come out from behind the door in the drawing-room.

All this time Jo has been standing on the spot where he woke up, ever picking his cap and putting bits of fur in his mouth. He spits them out with a remorseful air, for he feels that it is in his nature to be an unimprovable reprobate and that it's no good HIS trying to keep awake, for HE won't never know nothink. Though it may be, Jo, that there is a history so interesting and affecting even to minds as near the brutes as thine, recording deeds done on this earth for common men, that if the Chadbands, removing their own persons from the light, would but show it thee in simple reverence, would but leave it unimproved, would but regard it as being eloquent enough without their modest aid—it might hold thee awake, and thou might learn from it yet!

Jo never heard of any such book. Its compilers and the Reverend Chadband are all one to him, except that he knows the Reverend Chadband and would rather run away from him for an hour than hear him talk for five minutes. "It an't no good my waiting here no longer," thinks Jo. "Mr. Snagsby an't a-going to say nothink to me to-night." And downstairs he shuffles.

But downstairs is the charitable Guster, holding by the handrail of the kitchen stairs and warding off a fit, as yet doubtfully, the same having been induced by Mrs. Snagsby's screaming. She has her own supper of bread and cheese to hand to Jo, with whom she ventures to interchange a word or so for the first time.

"Here's something to eat, poor boy," says Guster.

"Thank'ee, mum," says Jo.

"Are you hungry?"

"Jist!" says Jo.

"What's gone of your father and your mother, eh?"

Jo stops in the middle of a bite and looks petrified. For this orphan charge of the Christian saint whose shrine was at Tooting has patted him on the shoulder, and it is the first time in his life that any decent hand has been so laid upon him.

"I never know'd nothink about 'em," says Jo.

“No more didn’t I of mine,” cries Guster. She is repressing symptoms favourable to the fit when she seems to take alarm at something and vanishes down the stairs.

“Jo,” whispers the law-stationer softly as the boy lingers on the step.

“Here I am, Mr. Snagsby!”

“I didn’t know you were gone—there’s another half-crown, Jo. It was quite right of you to say nothing about the lady the other night when we were out together. It would breed trouble. You can’t be too quiet, Jo.”

“I am fly, master!”

And so, good night.

A ghostly shade, frilled and night-capped, follows the law-stationer to the room he came from and glides higher up. And henceforth he begins, go where he will, to be attended by another shadow than his own, hardly less constant than his own, hardly less quiet than his own. And into whatsoever atmosphere of secrecy his own shadow may pass, let all concerned in the secrecy beware! For the watchful Mrs. Snagsby is there too—bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, shadow of his shadow.

CHAPTER XXVI

Sharpshooters

WINTRY MORNING, LOOKING WITH dull eyes and sallow face upon the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, finds its inhabitants unwilling to get out of bed. Many of them are not early risers at the brightest of times, being birds of night who roost when the sun is high and are wide awake and keen for prey when the stars shine out. Behind dingy blind and curtain, in upper story and garret, skulking more or less under false names, false hair, false titles, false jewellery, and false histories, a colony of brigands lie in their first sleep. Gentlemen of the green-baize road who could discourse from personal experience of foreign galleys and home treadmills; spies of strong governments that eternally quake with weakness and miserable fear, broken traitors, cowards, bullies, gamesters, shufflers, swindlers, and false witnesses; some not unmarked by the branding-iron beneath their dirty braid; all with more cruelty in them than was in Nero, and more crime than is in Newgate. For howsoever bad the devil can be in fustian or smock-frock (and he can be very bad in both), he is a more designing, callous, and intolerable devil when he sticks a pin in his shirt-front, calls himself a gentleman, backs a card or colour, plays a game or so of billiards, and knows a little about bills and promissory notes than in any other form he wears. And in such form Mr. Bucket shall find him, when he will, still pervading the tributary channels of Leicester Square.

But the wintry morning wants him not and wakes him not. It wakes Mr. George of the shooting gallery and his familiar. They arise, roll up and stow away their mattresses. Mr. George, having shaved himself before a looking-glass of minute proportions, then marches out, bare-headed and bare-chested, to the pump in the little yard and anon comes back shining with yellow soap, friction, drifting rain, and exceedingly cold water. As he rubs himself upon a large jack-towel, blowing like a military sort of diver just come up, his hair curling tighter and tighter on his sunburnt temples the more he rubs it so that it looks as if it never could be loosened by any less

coercive instrument than an iron rake or a curry-comb—as he rubs, and puffs, and polishes, and blows, turning his head from side to side the more conveniently to excoriate his throat, and standing with his body well bent forward to keep the wet from his martial legs, Phil, on his knees lighting a fire, looks round as if it were enough washing for him to see all that done, and sufficient renovation for one day to take in the superfluous health his master throws off.

When Mr. George is dry, he goes to work to brush his head with two hard brushes at once, to that unmerciful degree that Phil, shouldering his way round the gallery in the act of sweeping it, winks with sympathy. This chafing over, the ornamental part of Mr. George's toilet is soon performed. He fills his pipe, lights it, and marches up and down smoking, as his custom is, while Phil, raising a powerful odour of hot rolls and coffee, prepares breakfast. He smokes gravely and marches in slow time. Perhaps this morning's pipe is devoted to the memory of Gridley in his grave.

"And so, Phil," says George of the shooting gallery after several turns in silence, "you were dreaming of the country last night?"

Phil, by the by, said as much in a tone of surprise as he scrambled out of bed.

"Yes, guv'ner."

"What was it like?"

"I hardly know what it was like, guv'ner," said Phil, considering.

"How did you know it was the country?"

"On account of the grass, I think. And the swans upon it," says Phil after further consideration.

"What were the swans doing on the grass?"

"They was a-eating of it, I expect," says Phil.

The master resumes his march, and the man resumes his preparation of breakfast. It is not necessarily a lengthened preparation, being limited to the setting forth of very simple breakfast requisites for two and the broiling of a rasher of bacon at the fire in the rusty grate; but as Phil has to sidle round a considerable part of the gallery for every object he wants, and never brings two objects at once, it takes time under the circumstances. At length the breakfast is ready. Phil announcing it, Mr. George knocks the ashes out of his pipe on the hob, stands his pipe itself in the chimney corner, and sits down to the meal. When he has helped himself, Phil follows suit, sitting at

the extreme end of the little oblong table and taking his plate on his knees. Either in humility, or to hide his blackened hands, or because it is his natural manner of eating.

"The country," says Mr. George, plying his knife and fork; "why, I suppose you never clapped your eyes on the country, Phil?"

"I see the marshes once," says Phil, contentedly eating his breakfast.

"What marshes?"

"THE marshes, commander," returns Phil.

"Where are they?"

"I don't know where they are," says Phil; "but I see 'em, guv'ner. They was flat. And miste."

Governor and commander are interchangeable terms with Phil, expressive of the same respect and deference and applicable to nobody but Mr. George.

"I was born in the country, Phil."

"Was you indeed, commander?"

"Yes. And bred there."

Phil elevates his one eyebrow, and after respectfully staring at his master to express interest, swallows a great gulp of coffee, still staring at him.

"There's not a bird's note that I don't know," says Mr. George. "Not many an English leaf or berry that I couldn't name. Not many a tree that I couldn't climb yet if I was put to it. I was a real country boy, once. My good mother lived in the country."

"She must have been a fine old lady, guv'ner," Phil observes.

"Aye! And not so old either, five and thirty years ago," says Mr. George. "But I'll wager that at ninety she would be near as upright as me, and near as broad across the shoulders."

"Did she die at ninety, guv'ner?" inquires Phil.

"No. Bosh! Let her rest in peace, God bless her!" says the trooper. "What set me on about country boys, and runaways, and good-for-nothings? You, to be sure! So you never clapped your eyes upon the country—marshes and dreams excepted. Eh?"

Phil shakes his head.

"Do you want to see it?"

"N-no, I don't know as I do, particular," says Phil.

"The town's enough for you, eh?"

“Why, you see, commander,” says Phil, “I ain’t acquainted with anythink else, and I doubt if I ain’t a-getting too old to take to novelties.”

“How old ARE you, Phil?” asks the trooper, pausing as he conveys his smoking saucer to his lips.

“I’m something with a eight in it,” says Phil. “It can’t be eighty. Nor yet eighteen. It’s betwixt ’em, somewheres.”

Mr. George, slowly putting down his saucer without tasting its contents, is laughingly beginning, “Why, what the deuce, Phil—” when he stops, seeing that Phil is counting on his dirty fingers.

“I was just eight,” says Phil, “agreeable to the parish calculation, when I went with the tinker. I was sent on a errand, and I see him a-sittin under a old buildin with a fire all to himself wery comfortable, and he says, ‘Would you like to come along a me, my man?’ I says ‘Yes,’ and him and me and the fire goes home to Clerkenwell together. That was April Fool Day. I was able to count up to ten; and when April Fool Day come round again, I says to myself, ‘Now, old chap, you’re one and a eight in it.’ April Fool Day after that, I says, ‘Now, old chap, you’re two and a eight in it.’ In course of time, I come to ten and a eight in it; two tens and a eight in it. When it got so high, it got the upper hand of me, but this is how I always know there’s a eight in it.”

“Ah!” says Mr. George, resuming his breakfast. “And where’s the tinker?”

“Drink put him in the hospital, guv’ner, and the hospital put him—in a glass-case, I HAVE heerd,” Phil replies mysteriously.

“By that means you got promotion? Took the business, Phil?”

“Yes, commander, I took the business. Such as it was. It wasn’t much of a beat—round Saffron Hill, Hatton Garden, Clerkenwell, Smiffeld, and there—poor neighbourhood, where they uses up the kettles till they’re past mending. Most of the tramping tinkers used to come and lodge at our place; that was the best part of my master’s earnings. But they didn’t come to me. I warn’t like him. He could sing ’em a good song. I couldn’t! He could play ’em a tune on any sort of pot you please, so as it was iron or block tin. I never could do nothing with a pot but mend it or bile it—never had a note of music in me. Besides, I was too ill-looking, and their wives complained of me.”

“They were mighty particular. You would pass muster in a crowd, Phil!”

says the trooper with a pleasant smile.

"No, guv'ner," returns Phil, shaking his head. "No, I shouldn't. I was passable enough when I went with the tinker, though nothing to boast of then; but what with blowing the fire with my mouth when I was young, and spileing my complexion, and singeing my hair off, and swallering the smoke, and what with being nat'rally unfort'nate in the way of running against hot metal and marking myself by sich means, and what with having turn-ups with the tinker as I got older, almost whenever he was too far gone in drink—which was almost always—my beauty was queer, wery queer, even at that time. As to since, what with a dozen years in a dark forge where the men was given to larking, and what with being scorched in a accident at a gas-works, and what with being blowed out of winder case-filling at the firework business, I am ugly enough to be made a show on!"

Resigning himself to which condition with a perfectly satisfied manner, Phil begs the favour of another cup of coffee. While drinking it, he says, "It was after the case-filling blow-up when I first see you, commander. You remember?"

"I remember, Phil. You were walking along in the sun."

"Crawling, guv'ner, again a wall—"

"True, Phil—shouldering your way on—"

"In a night-cap!" exclaims Phil, excited.

"In a night-cap—"

"And hobbling with a couple of sticks!" cries Phil, still more excited.

"With a couple of sticks. When—"

"When you stops, you know," cries Phil, putting down his cup and saucer and hastily removing his plate from his knees, "and says to me, 'What, comrade! You have been in the wars!' I didn't say much to you, commander, then, for I was took by surprise that a person so strong and healthy and bold as you was should stop to speak to such a limping bag of bones as I was. But you says to me, says you, delivering it out of your chest as hearty as possible, so that it was like a glass of something hot, 'What accident have you met with? You have been badly hurt. What's amiss, old boy? Cheer up, and tell us about it!' Cheer up! I was cheered already! I says as much to you, you says more to me, I says more to you, you says more to me, and here I am, commander! Here I am, commander!" cries Phil, who has started from his chair and unaccountably begun to sidle away. "If a

mark's wanted, or if it will improve the business, let the customers take aim at me. They can't spoil MY beauty. I'M all right. Come on! If they want a man to box at, let 'em box at me. Let 'em knock me well about the head. I don't mind. If they want a light-weight to be throwed for practice, Cornwall, Devonshire, or Lancashire, let 'em throw me. They won't hurt ME. I have been throwed, all sorts of styles, all my life!"

With this unexpected speech, energetically delivered and accompanied by action illustrative of the various exercises referred to, Phil Squod shoulders his way round three sides of the gallery, and abruptly tacking off at his commander, makes a butt at him with his head, intended to express devotion to his service. He then begins to clear away the breakfast.

Mr. George, after laughing cheerfully and clapping him on the shoulder, assists in these arrangements and helps to get the gallery into business order. That done, he takes a turn at the dumb-bells, and afterwards weighing himself and opining that he is getting "too fleshy," engages with great gravity in solitary broadsword practice. Meanwhile Phil has fallen to work at his usual table, where he screws and unscrews, and cleans, and files, and whistles into small apertures, and blackens himself more and more, and seems to do and undo everything that can be done and undone about a gun.

Master and man are at length disturbed by footsteps in the passage, where they make an unusual sound, denoting the arrival of unusual company. These steps, advancing nearer and nearer to the gallery, bring into it a group at first sight scarcely reconcilable with any day in the year but the fifth of November.

It consists of a limp and ugly figure carried in a chair by two bearers and attended by a lean female with a face like a pinched mask, who might be expected immediately to recite the popular verses commemorative of the time when they did contrive to blow Old England up alive but for her keeping her lips tightly and defiantly closed as the chair is put down. At which point the figure in it gasping, "O Lord! Oh, dear me! I am shaken!" adds, "How de do, my dear friend, how de do?" Mr. George then descries, in the procession, the venerable Mr. Smallweed out for an airing, attended by his granddaughter Judy as body-guard.

"Mr. George, my dear friend," says Grandfather Smallweed, removing his right arm from the neck of one of his bearers, whom he has nearly throttled coming along, "how de do? You're surprised to see me, my dear

friend."

"I should hardly have been more surprised to have seen your friend in the city," returns Mr. George.

"I am very seldom out," pants Mr. Smallweed. "I haven't been out for many months. It's inconvenient—and it comes expensive. But I longed so much to see you, my dear Mr. George. How de do, sir?"

"I am well enough," says Mr. George. "I hope you are the same."

"You can't be too well, my dear friend." Mr. Smallweed takes him by both hands. "I have brought my granddaughter Judy. I couldn't keep her away. She longed so much to see you."

"Hum! She bears it calmly!" mutters Mr. George.

"So we got a hackney-cab, and put a chair in it, and just round the corner they lifted me out of the cab and into the chair, and carried me here that I might see my dear friend in his own establishment! This," says Grandfather Smallweed, alluding to the bearer, who has been in danger of strangulation and who withdraws adjusting his windpipe, "is the driver of the cab. He has nothing extra. It is by agreement included in his fare. This person," the other bearer, "we engaged in the street outside for a pint of beer. Which is twopence. Judy, give the person twopence. I was not sure you had a workman of your own here, my dear friend, or we needn't have employed this person."

Grandfather Smallweed refers to Phil with a glance of considerable terror and a half-subdued "O Lord! Oh, dear me!" Nor in his apprehension, on the surface of things, without some reason, for Phil, who has never beheld the apparition in the black-velvet cap before, has stopped short with a gun in his hand with much of the air of a dead shot intent on picking Mr. Smallweed off as an ugly old bird of the crow species.

"Judy, my child," says Grandfather Smallweed, "give the person his twopence. It's a great deal for what he has done."

The person, who is one of those extraordinary specimens of human fungus that spring up spontaneously in the western streets of London, ready dressed in an old red jacket, with a "mission" for holding horses and calling coaches, received his twopence with anything but transport, tosses the money into the air, catches it over-handed, and retires.

"My dear Mr. George," says Grandfather Smallweed, "would you be so kind as help to carry me to the fire? I am accustomed to a fire, and I am an

old man, and I soon chill. Oh, dear me!”

His closing exclamation is jerked out of the venerable gentleman by the suddenness with which Mr. Squod, like a genie, catches him up, chair and all, and deposits him on the hearth-stone.

“O Lord!” says Mr. Smallweed, panting. “Oh, dear me! Oh, my stars! My dear friend, your workman is very strong—and very prompt. O Lord, he is very prompt! Judy, draw me back a little. I’m being scorched in the legs,” which indeed is testified to the noses of all present by the smell of his worsted stockings.

The gentle Judy, having backed her grandfather a little way from the fire, and having shaken him up as usual, and having released his overshadowed eye from its black-velvet extinguisher, Mr. Smallweed again says, “Oh, dear me! O Lord!” and looking about and meeting Mr. George’s glance, again stretches out both hands.

“My dear friend! So happy in this meeting! And this is your establishment? It’s a delightful place. It’s a picture! You never find that anything goes off here accidentally, do you, my dear friend?” adds Grandfather Smallweed, very ill at ease.

“No, no. No fear of that.”

“And your workman. He—Oh, dear me!—he never lets anything off without meaning it, does he, my dear friend?”

“He has never hurt anybody but himself,” says Mr. George, smiling.

“But he might, you know. He seems to have hurt himself a good deal, and he might hurt somebody else,” the old gentleman returns. “He mightn’t mean it—or he even might. Mr. George, will you order him to leave his infernal fire-arms alone and go away?”

Obedient to a nod from the trooper, Phil retires, empty-handed, to the other end of the gallery. Mr. Smallweed, reassured, falls to rubbing his legs.

“And you’re doing well, Mr. George?” he says to the trooper, squarely standing faced about towards him with his broadsword in his hand. “You are prospering, please the Powers?”

Mr. George answers with a cool nod, adding, “Go on. You have not come to say that, I know.”

“You are so sprightly, Mr. George,” returns the venerable grandfather. “You are such good company.”

“Ha ha! Go on!” says Mr. George.

“My dear friend! But that sword looks awful gleaming and sharp. It might cut somebody, by accident. It makes me shiver, Mr. George. Curse him!” says the excellent old gentleman apart to Judy as the trooper takes a step or two away to lay it aside. “He owes me money, and might think of paying off old scores in this murdering place. I wish your brimstone grandmother was here, and he’d shave her head off.”

Mr. George, returning, folds his arms, and looking down at the old man, sliding every moment lower and lower in his chair, says quietly, “Now for it!”

“Ho!” cries Mr. Smallweed, rubbing his hands with an artful chuckle. “Yes. Now for it. Now for what, my dear friend?”

“For a pipe,” says Mr. George, who with great composure sets his chair in the chimney-corner, takes his pipe from the grate, fills it and lights it, and falls to smoking peacefully.

This tends to the discomfiture of Mr. Smallweed, who finds it so difficult to resume his object, whatever it may be, that he becomes exasperated and secretly claws the air with an impotent vindictiveness expressive of an intense desire to tear and rend the visage of Mr. George. As the excellent old gentleman’s nails are long and leaden, and his hands lean and veinous, and his eyes green and watery; and, over and above this, as he continues, while he claws, to slide down in his chair and to collapse into a shapeless bundle, he becomes such a ghastly spectacle, even in the accustomed eyes of Judy, that that young virgin pounces at him with something more than the ardour of affection and so shakes him up and pats and pokes him in divers parts of his body, but particularly in that part which the science of self-defence would call his wind, that in his grievous distress he utters enforced sounds like a paviour’s rammer.

When Judy has by these means set him up again in his chair, with a white face and a frosty nose (but still clawing), she stretches out her weazen forefinger and gives Mr. George one poke in the back. The trooper raising his head, she makes another poke at her esteemed grandfather, and having thus brought them together, stares rigidly at the fire.

“Aye, aye! Ho, ho! U—u—u—ugh!” chatters Grandfather Smallweed, swallowing his rage. “My dear friend!” (still clawing).

“I tell you what,” says Mr. George. “If you want to converse with me, you must speak out. I am one of the roughs, and I can’t go about and about.

I haven’t the art to do it. I am not clever enough. It don’t suit me. When you go winding round and round me,” says the trooper, putting his pipe between his lips again, “damme, if I don’t feel as if I was being smothered!”

And he inflates his broad chest to its utmost extent as if to assure himself that he is not smothered yet.

“If you have come to give me a friendly call,” continues Mr. George, “I am obliged to you; how are you? If you have come to see whether there’s any property on the premises, look about you; you are welcome. If you want to out with something, out with it!”

The blooming Judy, without removing her gaze from the fire, gives her grandfather one ghostly poke.

“You see! It’s her opinion too. And why the devil that young woman won’t sit down like a Christian,” says Mr. George with his eyes musingly fixed on Judy, “I can’t comprehend.”

“She keeps at my side to attend to me, sir,” says Grandfather Smallweed. “I am an old man, my dear Mr. George, and I need some attention. I can carry my years; I am not a brimstone poll-parrot” (snarling and looking unconsciously for the cushion), “but I need attention, my dear friend.”

“Well!” returns the trooper, wheeling his chair to face the old man. “Now then?”

“My friend in the city, Mr. George, has done a little business with a pupil of yours.”

“Has he?” says Mr. George. “I am sorry to hear it.”

“Yes, sir.” Grandfather Smallweed rubs his legs. “He is a fine young soldier now, Mr. George, by the name of Carstone. Friends came forward and paid it all up, honourable.”

“Did they?” returns Mr. George. “Do you think your friend in the city would like a piece of advice?”

“I think he would, my dear friend. From you.”

“I advise him, then, to do no more business in that quarter. There’s no more to be got by it. The young gentleman, to my knowledge, is brought to a dead halt.”

“No, no, my dear friend. No, no, Mr. George. No, no, no, sir,” remonstrates Grandfather Smallweed, cunningly rubbing his spare legs. “Not quite a dead halt, I think. He has good friends, and he is good for his pay, and he is good for the selling price of his commission, and he is good

for his chance in a lawsuit, and he is good for his chance in a wife, and—oh, do you know, Mr. George, I think my friend would consider the young gentleman good for something yet?" says Grandfather Smallweed, turning up his velvet cap and scratching his ear like a monkey.

Mr. George, who has put aside his pipe and sits with an arm on his chair-back, beats a tattoo on the ground with his right foot as if he were not particularly pleased with the turn the conversation has taken.

"But to pass from one subject to another," resumes Mr. Smallweed. "'To promote the conversation,' as a joker might say. To pass, Mr. George, from the ensign to the captain."

"What are you up to, now?" asks Mr. George, pausing with a frown in stroking the recollection of his moustache. "What captain?"

"Our captain. The captain we know of. Captain Hawdon."

"Oh! That's it, is it?" says Mr. George with a low whistle as he sees both grandfather and granddaughter looking hard at him. "You are there! Well? What about it? Come, I won't be smothered any more. Speak!"

"My dear friend," returns the old man, "I was applied—Judy, shake me up a little!—I was applied to yesterday about the captain, and my opinion still is that the captain is not dead."

"Bosh!" observes Mr. George.

"What was your remark, my dear friend?" inquires the old man with his hand to his ear.

"Bosh!"

"Ho!" says Grandfather Smallweed. "Mr. George, of my opinion you can judge for yourself according to the questions asked of me and the reasons given for asking 'em. Now, what do you think the lawyer making the inquiries wants?"

"A job," says Mr. George.

"Nothing of the kind!"

"Can't be a lawyer, then," says Mr. George, folding his arms with an air of confirmed resolution.

"My dear friend, he is a lawyer, and a famous one. He wants to see some fragment in Captain Hawdon's writing. He don't want to keep it. He only wants to see it and compare it with a writing in his possession."

"Well?"

"Well, Mr. George. Happening to remember the advertisement

concerning Captain Hawdon and any information that could be given respecting him, he looked it up and came to me—just as you did, my dear friend. WILL you shake hands? So glad you came that day! I should have missed forming such a friendship if you hadn't come!"

"Well, Mr. Smallweed?" says Mr. George again after going through the ceremony with some stiffness.

"I had no such thing. I have nothing but his signature. Plague pestilence and famine, battle murder and sudden death upon him," says the old man, making a curse out of one of his few remembrances of a prayer and squeezing up his velvet cap between his angry hands, "I have half a million of his signatures, I think! But you," breathlessly recovering his mildness of speech as Judy re-adjusts the cap on his skittle-ball of a head, "you, my dear Mr. George, are likely to have some letter or paper that would suit the purpose. Anything would suit the purpose, written in the hand."

"Some writing in that hand," says the trooper, pondering; "may be, I have."

"My dearest friend!"

"May be, I have not."

"Ho!" says Grandfather Smallweed, crest-fallen.

"But if I had bushels of it, I would not show as much as would make a cartridge without knowing why."

"Sir, I have told you why. My dear Mr. George, I have told you why."

"Not enough," says the trooper, shaking his head. "I must know more, and approve it."

"Then, will you come to the lawyer? My dear friend, will you come and see the gentleman?" urges Grandfather Smallweed, pulling out a lean old silver watch with hands like the leg of a skeleton. "I told him it was probable I might call upon him between ten and eleven this forenoon, and it's now half after ten. Will you come and see the gentleman, Mr. George?"

"Hum!" says he gravely. "I don't mind that. Though why this should concern you so much, I don't know."

"Everything concerns me that has a chance in it of bringing anything to light about him. Didn't he take us all in? Didn't he owe us immense sums, all round? Concern me? Who can anything about him concern more than me? Not, my dear friend," says Grandfather Smallweed, lowering his tone, "that I want YOU to betray anything. Far from it. Are you ready to come, my

dear friend?”

“Aye! I’ll come in a moment. I promise nothing, you know.”

“No, my dear Mr. George; no.”

“And you mean to say you’re going to give me a lift to this place, wherever it is, without charging for it?” Mr. George inquires, getting his hat and thick wash-leather gloves.

This pleasantry so tickles Mr. Smallweed that he laughs, long and low, before the fire. But ever while he laughs, he glances over his paralytic shoulder at Mr. George and eagerly watches him as he unlocks the padlock of a homely cupboard at the distant end of the gallery, looks here and there upon the higher shelves, and ultimately takes something out with a rustling of paper, folds it, and puts it in his breast. Then Judy pokes Mr. Smallweed once, and Mr. Smallweed pokes Judy once.

“I am ready,” says the trooper, coming back. “Phil, you can carry this old gentleman to his coach, and make nothing of him.”

“Oh, dear me! O Lord! Stop a moment!” says Mr. Smallweed. “He’s so very prompt! Are you sure you can do it carefully, my worthy man?”

Phil makes no reply, but seizing the chair and its load, sidles away, tightly hugged by the now speechless Mr. Smallweed, and bolts along the passage as if he had an acceptable commission to carry the old gentleman to the nearest volcano. His shorter trust, however, terminating at the cab, he deposits him there; and the fair Judy takes her place beside him, and the chair embellishes the roof, and Mr. George takes the vacant place upon the box.

Mr. George is quite confounded by the spectacle he beholds from time to time as he peeps into the cab through the window behind him, where the grim Judy is always motionless, and the old gentleman with his cap over one eye is always sliding off the seat into the straw and looking upward at him out of his other eye with a helpless expression of being jolted in the back.

CHAPTER XXVII

More Old Soldiers Than One

MR. GEORGE HAS NOT far to ride with folded arms upon the box, for their destination is Lincoln's Inn Fields. When the driver stops his horses, Mr. George alights, and looking in at the window, says, "What, Mr. Tulkinghorn's your man, is he?"

"Yes, my dear friend. Do you know him, Mr. George?"

"Why, I have heard of him—seen him too, I think. But I don't know him, and he don't know me."

There ensues the carrying of Mr. Smallweed upstairs, which is done to perfection with the trooper's help. He is borne into Mr. Tulkinghorn's great room and deposited on the Turkey rug before the fire. Mr. Tulkinghorn is not within at the present moment but will be back directly. The occupant of the pew in the hall, having said thus much, stirs the fire and leaves the triumvirate to warm themselves.

Mr. George is mightily curious in respect of the room. He looks up at the painted ceiling, looks round at the old law-books, contemplates the portraits of the great clients, reads aloud the names on the boxes.

"'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,'" Mr. George reads thoughtfully. "Ha! 'Manor of Chesney Wold.' Humph!" Mr. George stands looking at these boxes a long while—as if they were pictures—and comes back to the fire repeating, "Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and Manor of Chesney Wold, hey?"

"Worth a mint of money, Mr. George!" whispers Grandfather Smallweed, rubbing his legs. "Powerfully rich!"

"Who do you mean? This old gentleman, or the Baronet?"

"This gentleman, this gentleman."

"So I have heard; and knows a thing or two, I'll hold a wager. Not bad quarters, either," says Mr. George, looking round again. "See the strong-box yonder!"

This reply is cut short by Mr. Tulkinghorn's arrival. There is no change

in him, of course. Rustily drest, with his spectacles in his hand, and their very case worn threadbare. In manner, close and dry. In voice, husky and low. In face, watchful behind a blind; habitually not uncensorious and contemptuous perhaps. The peerage may have warmer worshippers and faithfuller believers than Mr. Tulkinghorn, after all, if everything were known.

"Good morning, Mr. Smallweed, good morning!" he says as he comes in. "You have brought the sergeant, I see. Sit down, sergeant."

As Mr. Tulkinghorn takes off his gloves and puts them in his hat, he looks with half-closed eyes across the room to where the trooper stands and says within himself perchance, "You'll do, my friend!"

"Sit down, sergeant," he repeats as he comes to his table, which is set on one side of the fire, and takes his easy-chair. "Cold and raw this morning, cold and raw!" Mr. Tulkinghorn warms before the bars, alternately, the palms and knuckles of his hands and looks (from behind that blind which is always down) at the trio sitting in a little semicircle before him.

"Now, I can feel what I am about" (as perhaps he can in two senses), "Mr. Smallweed." The old gentleman is newly shaken up by Judy to bear his part in the conversation. "You have brought our good friend the sergeant, I see."

"Yes, sir," returns Mr. Smallweed, very servile to the lawyer's wealth and influence.

"And what does the sergeant say about this business?"

"Mr. George," says Grandfather Smallweed with a tremulous wave of his shrivelled hand, "this is the gentleman, sir."

Mr. George salutes the gentleman but otherwise sits bolt upright and profoundly silent—very forward in his chair, as if the full complement of regulation appendages for a field-day hung about him.

Mr. Tulkinghorn proceeds, "Well, George—I believe your name is George?"

"It is so, Sir."

"What do you say, George?"

"I ask your pardon, sir," returns the trooper, "but I should wish to know what YOU say?"

"Do you mean in point of reward?"

"I mean in point of everything, sir."

This is so very trying to Mr. Smallweed's temper that he suddenly breaks out with "You're a brimstone beast!" and as suddenly asks pardon of Mr. Tulkinghorn, excusing himself for this slip of the tongue by saying to Judy, "I was thinking of your grandmother, my dear."

"I supposed, sergeant," Mr. Tulkinghorn resumes as he leans on one side of his chair and crosses his legs, "that Mr. Smallweed might have sufficiently explained the matter. It lies in the smallest compass, however. You served under Captain Hawdon at one time, and were his attendant in illness, and rendered him many little services, and were rather in his confidence, I am told. That is so, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, that is so," says Mr. George with military brevity.

"Therefore you may happen to have in your possession something—anything, no matter what; accounts, instructions, orders, a letter, anything—in Captain Hawdon's writing. I wish to compare his writing with some that I have. If you can give me the opportunity, you shall be rewarded for your trouble. Three, four, five, guineas, you would consider handsome, I dare say."

"Noble, my dear friend!" cries Grandfather Smallweed, screwing up his eyes.

"If not, say how much more, in your conscience as a soldier, you can demand. There is no need for you to part with the writing, against your inclination—though I should prefer to have it."

Mr. George sits squared in exactly the same attitude, looks at the painted ceiling, and says never a word. The irascible Mr. Smallweed scratches the air.

"The question is," says Mr. Tulkinghorn in his methodical, subdued, uninterested way, "first, whether you have any of Captain Hawdon's writing?"

"First, whether I have any of Captain Hawdon's writing, sir," repeats Mr. George.

"Secondly, what will satisfy you for the trouble of producing it?"

"Secondly, what will satisfy me for the trouble of producing it, sir," repeats Mr. George.

"Thirdly, you can judge for yourself whether it is at all like that," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, suddenly handing him some sheets of written paper tied together.

“Whether it is at all like that, sir. Just so,” repeats Mr. George.

All three repetitions Mr. George pronounces in a mechanical manner, looking straight at Mr. Tulkinghorn; nor does he so much as glance at the affidavit in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, that has been given to him for his inspection (though he still holds it in his hand), but continues to look at the lawyer with an air of troubled meditation.

“Well?” says Mr. Tulkinghorn. “What do you say?”

“Well, sir,” replies Mr. George, rising erect and looking immense, “I would rather, if you’ll excuse me, have nothing to do with this.”

Mr. Tulkinghorn, outwardly quite undisturbed, demands, “Why not?”

“Why, sir,” returns the trooper. “Except on military compulsion, I am not a man of business. Among civilians I am what they call in Scotland a ne’er-do-weel. I have no head for papers, sir. I can stand any fire better than a fire of cross questions. I mentioned to Mr. Smallweed, only an hour or so ago, that when I come into things of this kind I feel as if I was being smothered. And that is my sensation,” says Mr. George, looking round upon the company, “at the present moment.”

With that, he takes three strides forward to replace the papers on the lawyer’s table and three strides backward to resume his former station, where he stands perfectly upright, now looking at the ground and now at the painted ceiling, with his hands behind him as if to prevent himself from accepting any other document whatever.

Under this provocation, Mr. Smallweed’s favourite adjective of disparagement is so close to his tongue that he begins the words “my dear friend” with the monosyllable “brim,” thus converting the possessive pronoun into brimmy and appearing to have an impediment in his speech. Once past this difficulty, however, he exhorts his dear friend in the tenderest manner not to be rash, but to do what so eminent a gentleman requires, and to do it with a good grace, confident that it must be unobjectionable as well as profitable. Mr. Tulkinghorn merely utters an occasional sentence, as, “You are the best judge of your own interest, sergeant.” “Take care you do no harm by this.” “Please yourself, please yourself.” “If you know what you mean, that’s quite enough.” These he utters with an appearance of perfect indifference as he looks over the papers on his table and prepares to write a letter.

Mr. George looks distrustfully from the painted ceiling to the ground,

from the ground to Mr. Smallweed, from Mr. Smallweed to Mr. Tulkinghorn, and from Mr. Tulkinghorn to the painted ceiling again, often in his perplexity changing the leg on which he rests.

"I do assure you, sir," says Mr. George, "not to say it offensively, that between you and Mr. Smallweed here, I really am being smothered fifty times over. I really am, sir. I am not a match for you gentlemen. Will you allow me to ask why you want to see the captain's hand, in the case that I could find any specimen of it?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn quietly shakes his head. "No. If you were a man of business, sergeant, you would not need to be informed that there are confidential reasons, very harmless in themselves, for many such wants in the profession to which I belong. But if you are afraid of doing any injury to Captain Hawdon, you may set your mind at rest about that."

"Aye! He is dead, sir."

"IS he?" Mr. Tulkinghorn quietly sits down to write.

"Well, sir," says the trooper, looking into his hat after another disconcerted pause, "I am sorry not to have given you more satisfaction. If it would be any satisfaction to any one that I should be confirmed in my judgment that I would rather have nothing to do with this by a friend of mine who has a better head for business than I have, and who is an old soldier, I am willing to consult with him. I—I really am so completely smothered myself at present," says Mr. George, passing his hand hopelessly across his brow, "that I don't know but what it might be a satisfaction to me."

Mr. Smallweed, hearing that this authority is an old soldier, so strongly inculcates the expediency of the trooper's taking counsel with him, and particularly informing him of its being a question of five guineas or more, that Mr. George engages to go and see him. Mr. Tulkinghorn says nothing either way.

"I'll consult my friend, then, by your leave, sir," says the trooper, "and I'll take the liberty of looking in again with the final answer in the course of the day. Mr. Smallweed, if you wish to be carried downstairs—"

"In a moment, my dear friend, in a moment. Will you first let me speak half a word with this gentleman in private?"

"Certainly, sir. Don't hurry yourself on my account." The trooper retires to a distant part of the room and resumes his curious inspection of the

boxes, strong and otherwise.

“If I wasn’t as weak as a brimstone baby, sir,” whispers Grandfather Smallweed, drawing the lawyer down to his level by the lapel of his coat and flashing some half-quenched green fire out of his angry eyes, “I’d tear the writing away from him. He’s got it buttoned in his breast. I saw him put it there. Judy saw him put it there. Speak up, you crabbed image for the sign of a walking-stick shop, and say you saw him put it there!”

This vehement conjuration the old gentleman accompanies with such a thrust at his granddaughter that it is too much for his strength, and he slips away out of his chair, drawing Mr. Tulkinghorn with him, until he is arrested by Judy, and well shaken.

“Violence will not do for me, my friend,” Mr. Tulkinghorn then remarks coolly.

“No, no, I know, I know, sir. But it’s chafing and galling—it’s—it’s worse than your smattering chattering magpie of a grandmother,” to the imperturbable Judy, who only looks at the fire, “to know he has got what’s wanted and won’t give it up. He, not to give it up! HE! A vagabond! But never mind, sir, never mind. At the most, he has only his own way for a little while. I have him periodically in a vice. I’ll twist him, sir. I’ll screw him, sir. If he won’t do it with a good grace, I’ll make him do it with a bad one, sir! Now, my dear Mr. George,” says Grandfather Smallweed, winking at the lawyer hideously as he releases him, “I am ready for your kind assistance, my excellent friend!”

Mr. Tulkinghorn, with some shadowy sign of amusement manifesting itself through his self-possession, stands on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, watching the disappearance of Mr. Smallweed and acknowledging the trooper’s parting salute with one slight nod.

It is more difficult to get rid of the old gentleman, Mr. George finds, than to bear a hand in carrying him downstairs, for when he is replaced in his conveyance, he is so loquacious on the subject of the guineas and retains such an affectionate hold of his button—having, in truth, a secret longing to rip his coat open and rob him—that some degree of force is necessary on the trooper’s part to effect a separation. It is accomplished at last, and he proceeds alone in quest of his adviser.

By the cloisterly Temple, and by Whitefriars (there, not without a glance at Hanging-Sword Alley, which would seem to be something in his way),

and by Blackfriars Bridge, and Blackfriars Road, Mr. George sedately marches to a street of little shops lying somewhere in that ganglion of roads from Kent and Surrey, and of streets from the bridges of London, centring in the far-famed elephant who has lost his castle formed of a thousand four-horse coaches to a stronger iron monster than he, ready to chop him into mince-meat any day he dares. To one of the little shops in this street, which is a musician's shop, having a few fiddles in the window, and some Pan's pipes and a tambourine, and a triangle, and certain elongated scraps of music, Mr. George directs his massive tread. And halting at a few paces from it, as he sees a soldierly looking woman, with her outer skirts tucked up, come forth with a small wooden tub, and in that tub commence a-whisking and a-splashing on the margin of the pavement, Mr. George says to himself, "She's as usual, washing greens. I never saw her, except upon a baggage-waggon, when she wasn't washing greens!"

The subject of this reflection is at all events so occupied in washing greens at present that she remains unsuspicious of Mr. George's approach until, lifting up herself and her tub together when she has poured the water off into the gutter, she finds him standing near her. Her reception of him is not flattering.

"George, I never see you but I wish you was a hundred mile away!"

The trooper, without remarking on this welcome, follows into the musical-instrument shop, where the lady places her tub of greens upon the counter, and having shaken hands with him, rests her arms upon it.

"I never," she says, "George, consider Matthew Bagnet safe a minute when you're near him. You are that restless and that roving—"

"Yes! I know I am, Mrs. Bagnet. I know I am."

"You know you are!" says Mrs. Bagnet. "What's the use of that? WHY are you?"

"The nature of the animal, I suppose," returns the trooper good-humouredly.

"Ah!" cries Mrs. Bagnet, something shrilly. "But what satisfaction will the nature of the animal be to me when the animal shall have tempted my Mat away from the musical business to New Zealand or Australey?"

Mrs. Bagnet is not at all an ill-looking woman. Rather large-boned, a little coarse in the grain, and freckled by the sun and wind which have tanned her hair upon the forehead, but healthy, wholesome, and bright-eyed.

A strong, busy, active, honest-faced woman of from forty-five to fifty. Clean, hardy, and so economically dressed (though substantially) that the only article of ornament of which she stands possessed appear's to be her wedding-ring, around which her finger has grown to be so large since it was put on that it will never come off again until it shall mingle with Mrs. Bagnet's dust.

"Mrs. Bagnet," says the trooper, "I am on my parole with you. Mat will get no harm from me. You may trust me so far."

"Well, I think I may. But the very looks of you are unsettling," Mrs. Bagnet rejoins. "Ah, George, George! If you had only settled down and married Joe Pouch's widow when he died in North America, SHE'D have combed your hair for you."

"It was a chance for me, certainly," returns the trooper half laughingly, half seriously, "but I shall never settle down into a respectable man now. Joe Pouch's widow might have done me good—there was something in her, and something of her—but I couldn't make up my mind to it. If I had had the luck to meet with such a wife as Mat found!"

Mrs. Bagnet, who seems in a virtuous way to be under little reserve with a good sort of fellow, but to be another good sort of fellow herself for that matter, receives this compliment by flicking Mr. George in the face with a head of greens and taking her tub into the little room behind the shop.

"Why, Quebec, my poppet," says George, following, on invitation, into that department. "And little Malta, too! Come and kiss your Bluffy!"

These young ladies—not supposed to have been actually christened by the names applied to them, though always so called in the family from the places of their birth in barracks—are respectively employed on three-legged stools, the younger (some five or six years old) in learning her letters out of a penny primer, the elder (eight or nine perhaps) in teaching her and sewing with great assiduity. Both hail Mr. George with acclamations as an old friend and after some kissing and romping plant their stools beside him.

"And how's young Woolwich?" says Mr. George.

"Ah! There now!" cries Mrs. Bagnet, turning about from her saucepans (for she is cooking dinner) with a bright flush on her face. "Would you believe it? Got an engagement at the theayter, with his father, to play the fife in a military piece."

"Well done, my godson!" cries Mr. George, slapping his thigh.

“I believe you!” says Mrs. Bagnet. “He’s a Briton. That’s what Woolwich is. A Briton!”

“And Mat blows away at his bassoon, and you’re respectable civilians one and all,” says Mr. George. “Family people. Children growing up. Mat’s old mother in Scotland, and your old father somewhere else, corresponded with, and helped a little, and—well, well! To be sure, I don’t know why I shouldn’t be wished a hundred mile away, for I have not much to do with all this!”

Mr. George is becoming thoughtful, sitting before the fire in the whitewashed room, which has a sanded floor and a barrack smell and contains nothing superfluous and has not a visible speck of dirt or dust in it, from the faces of Quebec and Malta to the bright tin pots and pannikins upon the dresser shelves—Mr. George is becoming thoughtful, sitting here while Mrs. Bagnet is busy, when Mr. Bagnet and young Woolwich opportunely come home. Mr. Bagnet is an ex-artilleryman, tall and upright, with shaggy eyebrows and whiskers like the fibres of a coco-nut, not a hair upon his head, and a torrid complexion. His voice, short, deep, and resonant, is not at all unlike the tones of the instrument to which he is devoted. Indeed there may be generally observed in him an unbending, unyielding, brass-bound air, as if he were himself the bassoon of the human orchestra. Young Woolwich is the type and model of a young drummer.

Both father and son salute the trooper heartily. He saying, in due season, that he has come to advise with Mr. Bagnet, Mr. Bagnet hospitably declares that he will hear of no business until after dinner and that his friend shall not partake of his counsel without first partaking of boiled pork and greens. The trooper yielding to this invitation, he and Mr. Bagnet, not to embarrass the domestic preparations, go forth to take a turn up and down the little street, which they promenade with measured tread and folded arms, as if it were a rampart.

“George,” says Mr. Bagnet. “You know me. It’s my old girl that advises. She has the head. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained. Wait till the greens is off her mind. Then we’ll consult. Whatever the old girl says, do—do it!”

“I intend to, Mat,” replies the other. “I would sooner take her opinion than that of a college.”

“College,” returns Mr. Bagnet in short sentences, bassoon-like. “What

college could you leave—in another quarter of the world—with nothing but a grey cloak and an umbrella—to make its way home to Europe? The old girl would do it to-morrow. Did it once!”

“You are right,” says Mr. George.

“What college,” pursues Bagnet, “could you set up in life—with two penn’orth of white lime—a penn’orth of fuller’s earth—a ha’porth of sand—and the rest of the change out of sixpence in money? That’s what the old girl started on. In the present business.”

“I am rejoiced to hear it’s thriving, Mat.”

“The old girl,” says Mr. Bagnet, acquiescing, “saves. Has a stocking somewhere. With money in it. I never saw it. But I know she’s got it. Wait till the greens is off her mind. Then she’ll set you up.”

“She is a treasure!” exclaims Mr. George.

“She’s more. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained. It was the old girl that brought out my musical abilities. I should have been in the artillery now but for the old girl. Six years I hammered at the fiddle. Ten at the flute. The old girl said it wouldn’t do; intention good, but want of flexibility; try the bassoon. The old girl borrowed a bassoon from the bandmaster of the Rifle Regiment. I practised in the trenches. Got on, got another, get a living by it!”

George remarks that she looks as fresh as a rose and as sound as an apple.

“The old girl,” says Mr. Bagnet in reply, “is a thoroughly fine woman. Consequently she is like a thoroughly fine day. Gets finer as she gets on. I never saw the old girl’s equal. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained!”

Proceeding to converse on indifferent matters, they walk up and down the little street, keeping step and time, until summoned by Quebec and Malta to do justice to the pork and greens, over which Mrs. Bagnet, like a military chaplain, says a short grace. In the distribution of these comestibles, as in every other household duty, Mrs. Bagnet developes an exact system, sitting with every dish before her, allotting to every portion of pork its own portion of pot-liquor, greens, potatoes, and even mustard, and serving it out complete. Having likewise served out the beer from a can and thus supplied the mess with all things necessary, Mrs. Bagnet proceeds to satisfy her own hunger, which is in a healthy state. The kit of the mess, if

the table furniture may be so denominated, is chiefly composed of utensils of horn and tin that have done duty in several parts of the world. Young Woolwich's knife, in particular, which is of the oyster kind, with the additional feature of a strong shutting-up movement which frequently balks the appetite of that young musician, is mentioned as having gone in various hands the complete round of foreign service.

The dinner done, Mrs. Bagnet, assisted by the younger branches (who polish their own cups and platters, knives and forks), makes all the dinner garniture shine as brightly as before and puts it all away, first sweeping the hearth, to the end that Mr. Bagnet and the visitor may not be retarded in the smoking of their pipes. These household cares involve much pattening and counter-pattening in the backyard and considerable use of a pail, which is finally so happy as to assist in the ablutions of Mrs. Bagnet herself. That old girl reappearing by and by, quite fresh, and sitting down to her needlework, then and only then—the greens being only then to be considered as entirely off her mind—Mr. Bagnet requests the trooper to state his case.

This Mr. George does with great discretion, appearing to address himself to Mr. Bagnet, but having an eye solely on the old girl all the time, as Bagnet has himself. She, equally discreet, busies herself with her needlework. The case fully stated, Mr. Bagnet resorts to his standard artifice for the maintenance of discipline.

"That's the whole of it, is it, George?" says he.

"That's the whole of it."

"You act according to my opinion?"

"I shall be guided," replies George, "entirely by it."

"Old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, "give him my opinion. You know it. Tell him what it is."

It is that he cannot have too little to do with people who are too deep for him and cannot be too careful of interference with matters he does not understand—that the plain rule is to do nothing in the dark, to be a party to nothing underhanded or mysterious, and never to put his foot where he cannot see the ground. This, in effect, is Mr. Bagnet's opinion, as delivered through the old girl, and it so relieves Mr. George's mind by confirming his own opinion and banishing his doubts that he composes himself to smoke another pipe on that exceptional occasion and to have a talk over old times with the whole Bagnet family, according to their various ranges of

experience.

Through these means it comes to pass that Mr. George does not again rise to his full height in that parlour until the time is drawing on when the bassoon and fife are expected by a British public at the theatre; and as it takes time even then for Mr. George, in his domestic character of Bluffy, to take leave of Quebec and Malta and insinuate a sponsorial shilling into the pocket of his godson with felicitations on his success in life, it is dark when Mr. George again turns his face towards Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"A family home," he ruminates as he marches along, "however small it is, makes a man like me look lonely. But it's well I never made that evolution of matrimony. I shouldn't have been fit for it. I am such a vagabond still, even at my present time of life, that I couldn't hold to the gallery a month together if it was a regular pursuit or if I didn't camp there, gipsy fashion. Come! I disgrace nobody and cumber nobody; that's something. I have not done that for many a long year!"

So he whistles it off and marches on.

Arrived in Lincoln's Inn Fields and mounting Mr. Tulkinghorn's stair, he finds the outer door closed and the chambers shut, but the trooper not knowing much about outer doors, and the staircase being dark besides, he is yet fumbling and groping about, hoping to discover a bell-handle or to open the door for himself, when Mr. Tulkinghorn comes up the stairs (quietly, of course) and angrily asks, "Who is that? What are you doing there?"

"I ask your pardon, sir. It's George. The sergeant."

"And couldn't George, the sergeant, see that my door was locked?"

"Why, no, sir, I couldn't. At any rate, I didn't," says the trooper, rather nettled.

"Have you changed your mind? Or are you in the same mind?" Mr. Tulkinghorn demands. But he knows well enough at a glance.

"In the same mind, sir."

"I thought so. That's sufficient. You can go. So you are the man," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, opening his door with the key, "in whose hiding-place Mr. Gridley was found?"

"Yes, I AM the man," says the trooper, stopping two or three stairs down. "What then, sir?"

"What then? I don't like your associates. You should not have seen the inside of my door this morning if I had thought of your being that man.

Gridley? A threatening, murderous, dangerous fellow."

With these words, spoken in an unusually high tone for him, the lawyer goes into his rooms and shuts the door with a thundering noise.

Mr. George takes his dismissal in great dudgeon, the greater because a clerk coming up the stairs has heard the last words of all and evidently applies them to him. "A pretty character to bear," the trooper growls with a hasty oath as he strides downstairs. "A threatening, murderous, dangerous fellow!" And looking up, he sees the clerk looking down at him and marking him as he passes a lamp. This so intensifies his dudgeon that for five minutes he is in an ill humour. But he whistles that off like the rest of it and marches home to the shooting gallery.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Ironmaster

SIR LEICESTER DEDLOCK HAS got the better, for the time being, of the family gout and is once more, in a literal no less than in a figurative point of view, upon his legs. He is at his place in Lincolnshire; but the waters are out again on the low-lying grounds, and the cold and damp steal into Chesney Wold, though well defended, and eke into Sir Leicester's bones. The blazing fires of faggot and coal—Dedlock timber and antediluvian forest—that blaze upon the broad wide hearths and wink in the twilight on the frowning woods, sullen to see how trees are sacrificed, do not exclude the enemy. The hot-water pipes that trail themselves all over the house, the cushioned doors and windows, and the screens and curtains fail to supply the fires' deficiencies and to satisfy Sir Leicester's need. Hence the fashionable intelligence proclaims one morning to the listening earth that Lady Dedlock is expected shortly to return to town for a few weeks.

It is a melancholy truth that even great men have their poor relations. Indeed great men have often more than their fair share of poor relations, inasmuch as very red blood of the superior quality, like inferior blood unlawfully shed, WILL cry aloud and WILL be heard. Sir Leicester's cousins, in the remotest degree, are so many murders in the respect that they "will out." Among whom there are cousins who are so poor that one might almost dare to think it would have been the happier for them never to have been plated links upon the Dedlock chain of gold, but to have been made of common iron at first and done base service.

Service, however (with a few limited reservations, genteel but not profitable), they may not do, being of the Dedlock dignity. So they visit their richer cousins, and get into debt when they can, and live but shabbily when they can't, and find—the women no husbands, and the men no wives—and ride in borrowed carriages, and sit at feasts that are never of their own making, and so go through high life. The rich family sum has been divided by so many figures, and they are the something over that nobody

knows what to do with.

Everybody on Sir Leicester Dedlock's side of the question and of his way of thinking would appear to be his cousin more or less. From my Lord Boodle, through the Duke of Foodle, down to Noodle, Sir Leicester, like a glorious spider, stretches his threads of relationship. But while he is stately in the cousinship of the Everybodys, he is a kind and generous man, according to his dignified way, in the cousinship of the Nobodys; and at the present time, in despite of the damp, he stays out the visit of several such cousins at Chesney Wold with the constancy of a martyr.

Of these, foremost in the front rank stands Volumnia Dedlock, a young lady (of sixty) who is doubly highly related, having the honour to be a poor relation, by the mother's side, to another great family. Miss Volumnia, displaying in early life a pretty talent for cutting ornaments out of coloured paper, and also for singing to the guitar in the Spanish tongue, and propounding French conundrums in country houses, passed the twenty years of her existence between twenty and forty in a sufficiently agreeable manner. Lapsing then out of date and being considered to bore mankind by her vocal performances in the Spanish language, she retired to Bath, where she lives slenderly on an annual present from Sir Leicester and whence she makes occasional resurrections in the country houses of her cousins. She has an extensive acquaintance at Bath among appalling old gentlemen with thin legs and nankeen trousers, and is of high standing in that dreary city. But she is a little dreaded elsewhere in consequence of an indiscreet profusion in the article of rouge and persistency in an obsolete pearl necklace like a rosary of little bird's-eggs.

In any country in a wholesome state, Volumnia would be a clear case for the pension list. Efforts have been made to get her on it, and when William Buffy came in, it was fully expected that her name would be put down for a couple of hundred a year. But William Buffy somehow discovered, contrary to all expectation, that these were not the times when it could be done, and this was the first clear indication Sir Leicester Dedlock had conveyed to him that the country was going to pieces.

There is likewise the Honourable Bob Stables, who can make warm mashes with the skill of a veterinary surgeon and is a better shot than most gamekeepers. He has been for some time particularly desirous to serve his country in a post of good emoluments, unaccompanied by any trouble or

responsibility. In a well-regulated body politic this natural desire on the part of a spirited young gentleman so highly connected would be speedily recognized, but somehow William Buffy found when he came in that these were not times in which he could manage that little matter either, and this was the second indication Sir Leicester Dedlock had conveyed to him that the country was going to pieces.

The rest of the cousins are ladies and gentlemen of various ages and capacities, the major part amiable and sensible and likely to have done well enough in life if they could have overcome their cousinship; as it is, they are almost all a little worsted by it, and lounge in purposeless and listless paths, and seem to be quite as much at a loss how to dispose of themselves as anybody else can be how to dispose of them.

In this society, and where not, my Lady Dedlock reigns supreme. Beautiful, elegant, accomplished, and powerful in her little world (for the world of fashion does not stretch ALL the way from pole to pole), her influence in Sir Leicester's house, however haughty and indifferent her manner, is greatly to improve it and refine it. The cousins, even those older cousins who were paralysed when Sir Leicester married her, do her feudal homage; and the Honourable Bob Stables daily repeats to some chosen person between breakfast and lunch his favourite original remark, that she is the best-groomed woman in the whole stud.

Such the guests in the long drawing-room at Chesney Wold this dismal night when the step on the Ghost's Walk (inaudible here, however) might be the step of a deceased cousin shut out in the cold. It is near bed-time. Bedroom fires blaze brightly all over the house, raising ghosts of grim furniture on wall and ceiling. Bedroom candlesticks bristle on the distant table by the door, and cousins yawn on ottomans. Cousins at the piano, cousins at the soda-water tray, cousins rising from the card-table, cousins gathered round the fire. Standing on one side of his own peculiar fire (for there are two), Sir Leicester. On the opposite side of the broad hearth, my Lady at her table. Volumnia, as one of the more privileged cousins, in a luxurious chair between them. Sir Leicester glancing, with magnificent displeasure, at the rouge and the pearl necklace.

"I occasionally meet on my staircase here," drawls Volumnia, whose thoughts perhaps are already hopping up it to bed, after a long evening of very desultory talk, "one of the prettiest girls, I think, that I ever saw in my

life.”

“A PROTEGEE of my Lady’s,” observes Sir Leicester.

“I thought so. I felt sure that some uncommon eye must have picked that girl out. She really is a marvel. A dolly sort of beauty perhaps,” says Miss Volumnia, reserving her own sort, “but in its way, perfect; such bloom I never saw!”

Sir Leicester, with his magnificent glance of displeasure at the rouge, appears to say so too.

“Indeed,” remarks my Lady languidly, “if there is any uncommon eye in the case, it is Mrs. Rouncewell’s, and not mine. Rosa is her discovery.”

“Your maid, I suppose?”

“No. My anything; pet—secretary—messenger—I don’t know what.”

“You like to have her about you, as you would like to have a flower, or a bird, or a picture, or a poodle—no, not a poodle, though—or anything else that was equally pretty?” says Volumnia, sympathizing. “Yes, how charming now! And how well that delightful old soul Mrs. Rouncewell is looking. She must be an immense age, and yet she is as active and handsome! She is the dearest friend I have, positively!”

Sir Leicester feels it to be right and fitting that the housekeeper of Chesney Wold should be a remarkable person. Apart from that, he has a real regard for Mrs. Rouncewell and likes to hear her praised. So he says, “You are right, Volumnia,” which Volumnia is extremely glad to hear.

“She has no daughter of her own, has she?”

“Mrs. Rouncewell? No, Volumnia. She has a son. Indeed, she had two.”

My Lady, whose chronic malady of boredom has been sadly aggravated by Volumnia this evening, glances wearily towards the candlesticks and heaves a noiseless sigh.

“And it is a remarkable example of the confusion into which the present age has fallen; of the obliteration of landmarks, the opening of floodgates, and the uprooting of distinctions,” says Sir Leicester with stately gloom, “that I have been informed by Mr. Tulkinghorn that Mrs. Rouncewell’s son has been invited to go into Parliament.”

Miss Volumnia utters a little sharp scream.

“Yes, indeed,” repeats Sir Leicester. “Into Parliament.”

“I never heard of such a thing! Good gracious, what is the man?” exclaims Volumnia.

“He is called, I believe—an—ironmaster.” Sir Leicester says it slowly and with gravity and doubt, as not being sure but that he is called a lead-mistress or that the right word may be some other word expressive of some other relationship to some other metal.

Volumnia utters another little scream.

“He has declined the proposal, if my information from Mr. Tulkinghorn be correct, as I have no doubt it is. Mr. Tulkinghorn being always correct and exact; still that does not,” says Sir Leicester, “that does not lessen the anomaly, which is fraught with strange considerations—startling considerations, as it appears to me.”

Miss Volumnia rising with a look candlestick-wards, Sir Leicester politely performs the grand tour of the drawing-room, brings one, and lights it at my Lady’s shaded lamp.

“I must beg you, my Lady,” he says while doing so, “to remain a few moments, for this individual of whom I speak arrived this evening shortly before dinner and requested in a very becoming note”—Sir Leicester, with his habitual regard to truth, dwells upon it—“I am bound to say, in a very becoming and well-expressed note, the favour of a short interview with yourself and MYself on the subject of this young girl. As it appeared that he wished to depart to-night, I replied that we would see him before retiring.”

Miss Volumnia with a third little scream takes flight, wishing her hosts—O Lud!—well rid of the—what is it?—ironmaster!

The other cousins soon disperse, to the last cousin there. Sir Leicester rings the bell, “Make my compliments to Mr. Rouncewell, in the housekeeper’s apartments, and say I can receive him now.”

My Lady, who has heard all this with slight attention outwardly, looks towards Mr. Rouncewell as he comes in. He is a little over fifty perhaps, of a good figure, like his mother, and has a clear voice, a broad forehead from which his dark hair has retired, and a shrewd though open face. He is a responsible-looking gentleman dressed in black, portly enough, but strong and active. Has a perfectly natural and easy air and is not in the least embarrassed by the great presence into which he comes.

“Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, as I have already apologized for intruding on you, I cannot do better than be very brief. I thank you, Sir Leicester.”

The head of the Dedlocks has motioned towards a sofa between himself

and my Lady. Mr. Rouncewell quietly takes his seat there.

“In these busy times, when so many great undertakings are in progress, people like myself have so many workmen in so many places that we are always on the flight.”

Sir Leicester is content enough that the ironmaster should feel that there is no hurry there; there, in that ancient house, rooted in that quiet park, where the ivy and the moss have had time to mature, and the gnarled and warted elms and the umbrageous oaks stand deep in the fern and leaves of a hundred years; and where the sun-dial on the terrace has dumbly recorded for centuries that time which was as much the property of every Dedlock—while he lasted—as the house and lands. Sir Leicester sits down in an easy-chair, opposing his repose and that of Chesney Wold to the restless flights of ironmasters.

“Lady Dedlock has been so kind,” proceeds Mr. Rouncewell with a respectful glance and a bow that way, “as to place near her a young beauty of the name of Rosa. Now, my son has fallen in love with Rosa and has asked my consent to his proposing marriage to her and to their becoming engaged if she will take him—which I suppose she will. I have never seen Rosa until to-day, but I have some confidence in my son’s good sense—even in love. I find her what he represents her, to the best of my judgment; and my mother speaks of her with great commendation.”

“She in all respects deserves it,” says my Lady.

“I am happy, Lady Dedlock, that you say so, and I need not comment on the value to me of your kind opinion of her.”

“That,” observes Sir Leicester with unspeakable grandeur, for he thinks the ironmaster a little too glib, “must be quite unnecessary.”

“Quite unnecessary, Sir Leicester. Now, my son is a very young man, and Rosa is a very young woman. As I made my way, so my son must make his; and his being married at present is out of the question. But supposing I gave my consent to his engaging himself to this pretty girl, if this pretty girl will engage herself to him, I think it a piece of candour to say at once—I am sure, Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, you will understand and excuse me—I should make it a condition that she did not remain at Chesney Wold. Therefore, before communicating further with my son, I take the liberty of saying that if her removal would be in any way inconvenient or objectionable, I will hold the matter over with him for any reasonable time

and leave it precisely where it is."

Not remain at Chesney Wold! Make it a condition! All Sir Leicester's old misgivings relative to Wat Tyler and the people in the iron districts who do nothing but turn out by torchlight come in a shower upon his head, the fine grey hair of which, as well as of his whiskers, actually stirs with indignation.

"Am I to understand, sir," says Sir Leicester, "and is my Lady to understand"—he brings her in thus specially, first as a point of gallantry, and next as a point of prudence, having great reliance on her sense—"am I to understand, Mr. Rouncewell, and is my Lady to understand, sir, that you consider this young woman too good for Chesney Wold or likely to be injured by remaining here?"

"Certainly not, Sir Leicester,"

"I am glad to hear it." Sir Leicester very lofty indeed.

"Pray, Mr. Rouncewell," says my Lady, warning Sir Leicester off with the slightest gesture of her pretty hand, as if he were a fly, "explain to me what you mean."

"Willingly, Lady Dedlock. There is nothing I could desire more."

Addressing her composed face, whose intelligence, however, is too quick and active to be concealed by any studied impassiveness, however habitual, to the strong Saxon face of the visitor, a picture of resolution and perseverance, my Lady listens with attention, occasionally slightly bending her head.

"I am the son of your housekeeper, Lady Dedlock, and passed my childhood about this house. My mother has lived here half a century and will die here I have no doubt. She is one of those examples—perhaps as good a one as there is—of love, and attachment, and fidelity in such a nation, which England may well be proud of, but of which no order can appropriate the whole pride or the whole merit, because such an instance bespeaks high worth on two sides—on the great side assuredly, on the small one no less assuredly."

Sir Leicester snorts a little to hear the law laid down in this way, but in his honour and his love of truth, he freely, though silently, admits the justice of the ironmaster's proposition.

"Pardon me for saying what is so obvious, but I wouldn't have it hastily supposed," with the least turn of his eyes towards Sir Leicester, "that I am

ashamed of my mother’s position here, or wanting in all just respect for Chesney Wold and the family. I certainly may have desired—I certainly have desired, Lady Dedlock—that my mother should retire after so many years and end her days with me. But as I have found that to sever this strong bond would be to break her heart, I have long abandoned that idea.”

Sir Leicester very magnificent again at the notion of Mrs. Rouncewell being spirited off from her natural home to end her days with an ironmaster.

“I have been,” proceeds the visitor in a modest, clear way, “an apprentice and a workman. I have lived on workman’s wages, years and years, and beyond a certain point have had to educate myself. My wife was a foreman’s daughter, and plainly brought up. We have three daughters besides this son of whom I have spoken, and being fortunately able to give them greater advantages than we have had ourselves, we have educated them well, very well. It has been one of our great cares and pleasures to make them worthy of any station.”

A little boastfulness in his fatherly tone here, as if he added in his heart, “even of the Chesney Wold station.” Not a little more magnificence, therefore, on the part of Sir Leicester.

“All this is so frequent, Lady Dedlock, where I live, and among the class to which I belong, that what would be generally called unequal marriages are not of such rare occurrence with us as elsewhere. A son will sometimes make it known to his father that he has fallen in love, say, with a young woman in the factory. The father, who once worked in a factory himself, will be a little disappointed at first very possibly. It may be that he had other views for his son. However, the chances are that having ascertained the young woman to be of unblemished character, he will say to his son, ‘I must be quite sure you are in earnest here. This is a serious matter for both of you. Therefore I shall have this girl educated for two years,’ or it may be, ‘I shall place this girl at the same school with your sisters for such a time, during which you will give me your word and honour to see her only so often. If at the expiration of that time, when she has so far profited by her advantages as that you may be upon a fair equality, you are both in the same mind, I will do my part to make you happy.’ I know of several cases such as I describe, my Lady, and I think they indicate to me my own course now.”

Sir Leicester’s magnificence explodes. Calmly, but terribly.

“Mr. Rouncewell,” says Sir Leicester with his right hand in the breast of

his blue coat, the attitude of state in which he is painted in the gallery, “do you draw a parallel between Chesney Wold and a—” Here he resists a disposition to choke, “a factory?”

“I need not reply, Sir Leicester, that the two places are very different; but for the purposes of this case, I think a parallel may be justly drawn between them.”

Sir Leicester directs his majestic glance down one side of the long drawing-room and up the other before he can believe that he is awake.

“Are you aware, sir, that this young woman whom my Lady—my Lady—has placed near her person was brought up at the village school outside the gates?”

“Sir Leicester, I am quite aware of it. A very good school it is, and handsomely supported by this family.”

“Then, Mr. Rouncewell,” returns Sir Leicester, “the application of what you have said is, to me, incomprehensible.”

“Will it be more comprehensible, Sir Leicester, if I say,” the ironmaster is reddening a little, “that I do not regard the village school as teaching everything desirable to be known by my son’s wife?”

From the village school of Chesney Wold, intact as it is this minute, to the whole framework of society; from the whole framework of society, to the aforesaid framework receiving tremendous cracks in consequence of people (iron-masters, lead-mistresses, and what not) not minding their catechism, and getting out of the station unto which they are called—necessarily and for ever, according to Sir Leicester’s rapid logic, the first station in which they happen to find themselves; and from that, to their educating other people out of THEIR stations, and so obliterating the landmarks, and opening the floodgates, and all the rest of it; this is the swift progress of the Dedlock mind.

“My Lady, I beg your pardon. Permit me, for one moment!” She has given a faint indication of intending to speak. “Mr. Rouncewell, our views of duty, and our views of station, and our views of education, and our views of—in short, ALL our views—are so diametrically opposed, that to prolong this discussion must be repellent to your feelings and repellent to my own. This young woman is honoured with my Lady’s notice and favour. If she wishes to withdraw herself from that notice and favour or if she chooses to place herself under the influence of any one who may in his peculiar

opinions—you will allow me to say, in his peculiar opinions, though I readily admit that he is not accountable for them to me—who may, in his peculiar opinions, withdraw her from that notice and favour, she is at any time at liberty to do so. We are obliged to you for the plainness with which you have spoken. It will have no effect of itself, one way or other, on the young woman's position here. Beyond this, we can make no terms; and here we beg—if you will be so good—to leave the subject."

The visitor pauses a moment to give my Lady an opportunity, but she says nothing. He then rises and replies, "Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, allow me to thank you for your attention and only to observe that I shall very seriously recommend my son to conquer his present inclinations. Good night!"

"Mr. Rouncewell," says Sir Leicester with all the nature of a gentleman shining in him, "it is late, and the roads are dark. I hope your time is not so precious but that you will allow my Lady and myself to offer you the hospitality of Chesney Wold, for to-night at least."

"I hope so," adds my Lady.

"I am much obliged to you, but I have to travel all night in order to reach a distant part of the country punctually at an appointed time in the morning."

Therewith the ironmaster takes his departure, Sir Leicester ringing the bell and my Lady rising as he leaves the room.

When my Lady goes to her boudoir, she sits down thoughtfully by the fire, and inattentive to the Ghost's Walk, looks at Rosa, writing in an inner room. Presently my Lady calls her.

"Come to me, child. Tell me the truth. Are you in love?"

"Oh! My Lady!"

My Lady, looking at the downcast and blushing face, says smiling, "Who is it? Is it Mrs. Rouncewell's grandson?"

"Yes, if you please, my Lady. But I don't know that I am in love with him—yet."

"Yet, you silly little thing! Do you know that he loves YOU, yet?"

"I think he likes me a little, my Lady." And Rosa bursts into tears.

Is this Lady Dedlock standing beside the village beauty, smoothing her dark hair with that motherly touch, and watching her with eyes so full of musing interest? Aye, indeed it is!

“Listen to me, child. You are young and true, and I believe you are attached to me.”

“Indeed I am, my Lady. Indeed there is nothing in the world I wouldn’t do to show how much.”

“And I don’t think you would wish to leave me just yet, Rosa, even for a lover?”

“No, my Lady! Oh, no!” Rosa looks up for the first time, quite frightened at the thought.

“Confide in me, my child. Don’t fear me. I wish you to be happy, and will make you so—if I can make anybody happy on this earth.”

Rosa, with fresh tears, kneels at her feet and kisses her hand. My Lady takes the hand with which she has caught it, and standing with her eyes fixed on the fire, puts it about and about between her own two hands, and gradually lets it fall. Seeing her so absorbed, Rosa softly withdraws; but still my Lady’s eyes are on the fire.

In search of what? Of any hand that is no more, of any hand that never was, of any touch that might have magically changed her life? Or does she listen to the Ghost’s Walk and think what step does it most resemble? A man’s? A woman’s? The pattering of a little child’s feet, ever coming on—on—on? Some melancholy influence is upon her, or why should so proud a lady close the doors and sit alone upon the hearth so desolate?

Volumnia is away next day, and all the cousins are scattered before dinner. Not a cousin of the batch but is amazed to hear from Sir Leicester at breakfast-time of the obliteration of landmarks, and opening of floodgates, and cracking of the framework of society, manifested through Mrs. Rouncewell’s son. Not a cousin of the batch but is really indignant, and connects it with the feebleness of William Buffy when in office, and really does feel deprived of a stake in the country—or the pension list—or something—by fraud and wrong. As to Volumnia, she is handed down the great staircase by Sir Leicester, as eloquent upon the theme as if there were a general rising in the north of England to obtain her rouge-pot and pearl necklace. And thus, with a clatter of maids and valets—for it is one appurtenance of their cousinship that however difficult they may find it to keep themselves, they MUST keep maids and valets—the cousins disperse to the four winds of heaven; and the one wintry wind that blows to-day shakes a shower from the trees near the deserted house, as if all the cousins had

been changed into leaves.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Young Man

CHESNEY WOLD IS SHUT up, carpets are rolled into great scrolls in corners of comfortless rooms, bright damask does penance in brown holland, carving and gilding puts on mortification, and the Dedlock ancestors retire from the light of day again. Around and around the house the leaves fall thick, but never fast, for they come circling down with a dead lightness that is sombre and slow. Let the gardener sweep and sweep the turf as he will, and press the leaves into full barrows, and wheel them off, still they lie ankle-deep. Howls the shrill wind round Chesney Wold; the sharp rain beats, the windows rattle, and the chimneys growl. Mists hide in the avenues, veil the points of view, and move in funeral-wise across the rising grounds. On all the house there is a cold, blank smell like the smell of a little church, though something dryer, suggesting that the dead and buried Dedlocks walk there in the long nights and leave the flavour of their graves behind them.

But the house in town, which is rarely in the same mind as Chesney Wold at the same time, seldom rejoicing when it rejoices or mourning when it mourns, excepting when a Dedlock dies—the house in town shines out awakened. As warm and bright as so much state may be, as delicately redolent of pleasant scents that bear no trace of winter as hothouse flowers can make it, soft and hushed so that the ticking of the clocks and the crisp burning of the fires alone disturb the stillness in the rooms, it seems to wrap those chilled bones of Sir Leicester’s in rainbow-coloured wool. And Sir Leicester is glad to repose in dignified contentment before the great fire in the library, condescendingly perusing the backs of his books or honouring the fine arts with a glance of approbation. For he has his pictures, ancient and modern. Some of the Fancy Ball School in which art occasionally condescends to become a master, which would be best catalogued like the miscellaneous articles in a sale. As “Three high-backed chairs, a table and cover, long-necked bottle (containing wine), one flask, one Spanish female’s costume, three-quarter face portrait of Miss Jogg the model, and a

suit of armour containing Don Quixote." Or "One stone terrace (cracked), one gondola in distance, one Venetian senator's dress complete, richly embroidered white satin costume with profile portrait of Miss Jogg the model, one Scimitar superbly mounted in gold with jewelled handle, elaborate Moorish dress (very rare), and Othello."

Mr. Tulkinghorn comes and goes pretty often, there being estate business to do, leases to be renewed, and so on. He sees my Lady pretty often, too; and he and she are as composed, and as indifferent, and take as little heed of one another, as ever. Yet it may be that my Lady fears this Mr. Tulkinghorn and that he knows it. It may be that he pursues her doggedly and steadily, with no touch of compunction, remorse, or pity. It may be that her beauty and all the state and brilliancy surrounding her only gives him the greater zest for what he is set upon and makes him the more inflexible in it. Whether he be cold and cruel, whether immovable in what he has made his duty, whether absorbed in love of power, whether determined to have nothing hidden from him in ground where he has burrowed among secrets all his life, whether he in his heart despises the splendour of which he is a distant beam, whether he is always treasuring up slights and offences in the affability of his gorgeous clients—whether he be any of this, or all of this, it may be that my Lady had better have five thousand pairs of fashionable eyes upon her, in distrustful vigilance, than the two eyes of this rusty lawyer with his wisp of neckcloth and his dull black breeches tied with ribbons at the knees.

Sir Leicester sits in my Lady's room—that room in which Mr. Tulkinghorn read the affidavit in Jarndyce and Jarndyce—particularly complacent. My Lady, as on that day, sits before the fire with her screen in her hand. Sir Leicester is particularly complacent because he has found in his newspaper some congenial remarks bearing directly on the floodgates and the framework of society. They apply so happily to the late case that Sir Leicester has come from the library to my Lady's room expressly to read them aloud. "The man who wrote this article," he observes by way of preface, nodding at the fire as if he were nodding down at the man from a mount, "has a well-balanced mind."

The man's mind is not so well balanced but that he bores my Lady, who, after a languid effort to listen, or rather a languid resignation of herself to a show of listening, becomes distraught and falls into a contemplation of the

fire as if it were her fire at Chesney Wold, and she had never left it. Sir Leicester, quite unconscious, reads on through his double eye-glass, occasionally stopping to remove his glass and express approval, as “Very true indeed,” “Very properly put,” “I have frequently made the same remark myself,” invariably losing his place after each observation, and going up and down the column to find it again.

Sir Leicester is reading with infinite gravity and state when the door opens, and the Mercury in powder makes this strange announcement, “The young man, my Lady, of the name of Guppy.”

Sir Leicester pauses, stares, repeats in a killing voice, “The young man of the name of Guppy?”

Looking round, he beholds the young man of the name of Guppy, much discomfited and not presenting a very impressive letter of introduction in his manner and appearance.

“Pray,” says Sir Leicester to Mercury, “what do you mean by announcing with this abruptness a young man of the name of Guppy?”

“I beg your pardon, Sir Leicester, but my Lady said she would see the young man whenever he called. I was not aware that you were here, Sir Leicester.”

With this apology, Mercury directs a scornful and indignant look at the young man of the name of Guppy which plainly says, “What do you come calling here for and getting ME into a row?”

“It’s quite right. I gave him those directions,” says my Lady. “Let the young man wait.”

“By no means, my Lady. Since he has your orders to come, I will not interrupt you.” Sir Leicester in his gallantry retires, rather declining to accept a bow from the young man as he goes out and majestically supposing him to be some shoemaker of intrusive appearance.

Lady Dedlock looks imperiously at her visitor when the servant has left the room, casting her eyes over him from head to foot. She suffers him to stand by the door and asks him what he wants.

“That your ladyship would have the kindness to oblige me with a little conversation,” returns Mr. Guppy, embarrassed.

“You are, of course, the person who has written me so many letters?”

“Several, your ladyship. Several before your ladyship condescended to favour me with an answer.”

“And could you not take the same means of rendering a Conversation unnecessary? Can you not still?”

Mr. Guppy screws his mouth into a silent “No!” and shakes his head.

“You have been strangely importunate. If it should appear, after all, that what you have to say does not concern me—and I don’t know how it can, and don’t expect that it will—you will allow me to cut you short with but little ceremony. Say what you have to say, if you please.”

My Lady, with a careless toss of her screen, turns herself towards the fire again, sitting almost with her back to the young man of the name of Guppy.

“With your ladyship’s permission, then,” says the young man, “I will now enter on my business. Hem! I am, as I told your ladyship in my first letter, in the law. Being in the law, I have learnt the habit of not committing myself in writing, and therefore I did not mention to your ladyship the name of the firm with which I am connected and in which my standing—and I may add income—is tolerably good. I may now state to your ladyship, in confidence, that the name of that firm is Kenge and Carboy, of Lincoln’s Inn, which may not be altogether unknown to your ladyship in connexion with the case in Chancery of Jarndyce and Jarndyce.”

My Lady’s figure begins to be expressive of some attention. She has ceased to toss the screen and holds it as if she were listening.

“Now, I may say to your ladyship at once,” says Mr. Guppy, a little emboldened, “it is no matter arising out of Jarndyce and Jarndyce that made me so desirous to speak to your ladyship, which conduct I have no doubt did appear, and does appear, obtrusive—in fact, almost blackguardly.”

After waiting for a moment to receive some assurance to the contrary, and not receiving any, Mr. Guppy proceeds, “If it had been Jarndyce and Jarndyce, I should have gone at once to your ladyship’s solicitor, Mr. Tulkinghorn, of the Fields. I have the pleasure of being acquainted with Mr. Tulkinghorn—at least we move when we meet one another—and if it had been any business of that sort, I should have gone to him.”

My Lady turns a little round and says, “You had better sit down.”

“Thank your ladyship.” Mr. Guppy does so. “Now, your ladyship”—Mr. Guppy refers to a little slip of paper on which he has made small notes of his line of argument and which seems to involve him in the densest obscurity whenever he looks at it—“I—Oh, yes!—I place myself entirely in your ladyship’s hands. If your ladyship was to make any complaint to

Kenge and Carboy or to Mr. Tulkinghorn of the present visit, I should be placed in a very disagreeable situation. That, I openly admit. Consequently, I rely upon your ladyship's honour."

My Lady, with a disdainful gesture of the hand that holds the screen, assures him of his being worth no complaint from her.

"Thank your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy; "quite satisfactory. Now—I—dash it!—The fact is that I put down a head or two here of the order of the points I thought of touching upon, and they're written short, and I can't quite make out what they mean. If your ladyship will excuse me taking it to the window half a moment, I—"

Mr. Guppy, going to the window, tumbles into a pair of love-birds, to whom he says in his confusion, "I beg your pardon, I am sure." This does not tend to the greater legibility of his notes. He murmurs, growing warm and red and holding the slip of paper now close to his eyes, now a long way off, "C.S. What's C.S. for? Oh! C.S.! Oh, I know! Yes, to be sure!" And comes back enlightened.

"I am not aware," says Mr. Guppy, standing midway between my Lady and his chair, "whether your ladyship ever happened to hear of, or to see, a young lady of the name of Miss Esther Summerson."

My Lady's eyes look at him full. "I saw a young lady of that name not long ago. This past autumn."

"Now, did it strike your ladyship that she was like anybody?" asks Mr. Guppy, crossing his arms, holding his head on one side, and scratching the corner of his mouth with his memoranda.

My Lady removes her eyes from him no more.

"No."

"Not like your ladyship's family?"

"No."

"I think your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy, "can hardly remember Miss Summerson's face?"

"I remember the young lady very well. What has this to do with me?"

"Your ladyship, I do assure you that having Miss Summerson's image imprinted on my 'eart—which I mention in confidence—I found, when I had the honour of going over your ladyship's mansion of Chesney Wold while on a short out in the county of Lincolnshire with a friend, such a resemblance between Miss Esther Summerson and your ladyship's own

portrait that it completely knocked me over, so much so that I didn't at the moment even know what it WAS that knocked me over. And now I have the honour of beholding your ladyship near (I have often, since that, taken the liberty of looking at your ladyship in your carriage in the park, when I dare say you was not aware of me, but I never saw your ladyship so near), it's really more surprising than I thought it."

Young man of the name of Guppy! There have been times, when ladies lived in strongholds and had unscrupulous attendants within call, when that poor life of yours would NOT have been worth a minute's purchase, with those beautiful eyes looking at you as they look at this moment.

My Lady, slowly using her little hand-screen as a fan, asks him again what he supposes that his taste for likenesses has to do with her.

"Your ladyship," replies Mr. Guppy, again referring to his paper, "I am coming to that. Dash these notes! Oh! 'Mrs. Chadband.' Yes." Mr. Guppy draws his chair a little forward and seats himself again. My Lady reclines in her chair composedly, though with a trifle less of graceful ease than usual perhaps, and never falters in her steady gaze. "A—stop a minute, though!" Mr. Guppy refers again. "E.S. twice? Oh, yes! Yes, I see my way now, right on."

Rolling up the slip of paper as an instrument to point his speech with, Mr. Guppy proceeds.

"Your ladyship, there is a mystery about Miss Esther Summerson's birth and bringing up. I am informed of that fact because—which I mention in confidence—I know it in the way of my profession at Kenge and Carboy's. Now, as I have already mentioned to your ladyship, Miss Summerson's image is imprinted on my 'eart. If I could clear this mystery for her, or prove her to be well related, or find that having the honour to be a remote branch of your ladyship's family she had a right to be made a party in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, why, I might make a sort of a claim upon Miss Summerson to look with an eye of more dedicated favour on my proposals than she has exactly done as yet. In fact, as yet she hasn't favoured them at all."

A kind of angry smile just dawns upon my Lady's face.

"Now, it's a very singular circumstance, your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy, "though one of those circumstances that do fall in the way of us professional men—which I may call myself, for though not admitted, yet I

have had a present of my articles made to me by Kenge and Carboy, on my mother's advancing from the principal of her little income the money for the stamp, which comes heavy—that I have encountered the person who lived as servant with the lady who brought Miss Summerson up before Mr. Jarndyce took charge of her. That lady was a Miss Barbary, your ladyship."

Is the dead colour on my Lady's face reflected from the screen which has a green silk ground and which she holds in her raised hand as if she had forgotten it, or is it a dreadful paleness that has fallen on her?

"Did your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy, "ever happen to hear of Miss Barbary?"

"I don't know. I think so. Yes."

"Was Miss Barbary at all connected with your ladyship's family?"

My Lady's lips move, but they utter nothing. She shakes her head.

"NOT connected?" says Mr. Guppy. "Oh! Not to your ladyship's knowledge, perhaps? Ah! But might be? Yes." After each of these interrogatories, she has inclined her head. "Very good! Now, this Miss Barbary was extremely close—seems to have been extraordinarily close for a female, females being generally (in common life at least) rather given to conversation—and my witness never had an idea whether she possessed a single relative. On one occasion, and only one, she seems to have been confidential to my witness on a single point, and she then told her that the little girl's real name was not Esther Summerson, but Esther Hawdon."

"My God!"

Mr. Guppy stares. Lady Dedlock sits before him looking him through, with the same dark shade upon her face, in the same attitude even to the holding of the screen, with her lips a little apart, her brow a little contracted, but for the moment dead. He sees her consciousness return, sees a tremor pass across her frame like a ripple over water, sees her lips shake, sees her compose them by a great effort, sees her force herself back to the knowledge of his presence and of what he has said. All this, so quickly, that her exclamation and her dead condition seem to have passed away like the features of those long-preserved dead bodies sometimes opened up in tombs, which, struck by the air like lightning, vanish in a breath.

"Your ladyship is acquainted with the name of Hawdon?"

"I have heard it before."

"Name of any collateral or remote branch of your ladyship's family?"

“No.”

“Now, your ladyship,” says Mr. Guppy, “I come to the last point of the case, so far as I have got it up. It’s going on, and I shall gather it up closer and closer as it goes on. Your ladyship must know—if your ladyship don’t happen, by any chance, to know already—that there was found dead at the house of a person named Krook, near Chancery Lane, some time ago, a law-writer in great distress. Upon which law-writer there was an inquest, and which law-writer was an anonymous character, his name being unknown. But, your ladyship, I have discovered very lately that that law-writer’s name was Hawdon.”

“And what is THAT to me?”

“Aye, your ladyship, that’s the question! Now, your ladyship, a queer thing happened after that man’s death. A lady started up, a disguised lady, your ladyship, who went to look at the scene of action and went to look at his grave. She hired a crossing-sweeping boy to show it her. If your ladyship would wish to have the boy produced in corroboration of this statement, I can lay my hand upon him at any time.”

The wretched boy is nothing to my Lady, and she does NOT wish to have him produced.

“Oh, I assure your ladyship it’s a very queer start indeed,” says Mr. Guppy. “If you was to hear him tell about the rings that sparkled on her fingers when she took her glove off, you’d think it quite romantic.”

There are diamonds glittering on the hand that holds the screen. My Lady trifles with the screen and makes them glitter more, again with that expression which in other times might have been so dangerous to the young man of the name of Guppy.

“It was supposed, your ladyship, that he left no rag or scrap behind him by which he could be possibly identified. But he did. He left a bundle of old letters.”

The screen still goes, as before. All this time her eyes never once release him.

“They were taken and secreted. And to-morrow night, your ladyship, they will come into my possession.”

“Still I ask you, what is this to me?”

“Your ladyship, I conclude with that.” Mr. Guppy rises. “If you think there’s enough in this chain of circumstances put together—in the

undoubted strong likeness of this young lady to your ladyship, which is a positive fact for a jury; in her having been brought up by Miss Barbary; in Miss Barbary stating Miss Summerson's real name to be Hawdon; in your ladyship's knowing both these names VERY WELL; and in Hawdon's dying as he did—to give your ladyship a family interest in going further into the case, I will bring these papers here. I don't know what they are, except that they are old letters: I have never had them in my possession yet. I will bring those papers here as soon as I get them and go over them for the first time with your ladyship. I have told your ladyship my object. I have told your ladyship that I should be placed in a very disagreeable situation if any complaint was made, and all is in strict confidence."

Is this the full purpose of the young man of the name of Guppy, or has he any other? Do his words disclose the length, breadth, depth, of his object and suspicion in coming here; or if not, what do they hide? He is a match for my Lady there. She may look at him, but he can look at the table and keep that witness-box face of his from telling anything.

"You may bring the letters," says my Lady, "if you choose."

"Your ladyship is not very encouraging, upon my word and honour," says Mr. Guppy, a little injured.

"You may bring the letters," she repeats in the same tone, "if you—please."

"It shall be done. I wish your ladyship good day."

On a table near her is a rich bauble of a casket, barred and clasped like an old strong-chest. She, looking at him still, takes it to her and unlocks it.

"Oh! I assure your ladyship I am not actuated by any motives of that sort," says Mr. Guppy, "and I couldn't accept anything of the kind. I wish your ladyship good day, and am much obliged to you all the same."

So the young man makes his bow and goes downstairs, where the supercilious Mercury does not consider himself called upon to leave his Olympus by the hall-fire to let the young man out.

As Sir Leicester basks in his library and dozes over his newspaper, is there no influence in the house to startle him, not to say to make the very trees at Chesney Wold fling up their knotted arms, the very portraits frown, the very armour stir?

No. Words, sobs, and cries are but air, and air is so shut in and shut out throughout the house in town that sounds need be uttered trumpet-tongued

indeed by my Lady in her chamber to carry any faint vibration to Sir Leicester’s ears; and yet this cry is in the house, going upward from a wild figure on its knees.

“O my child, my child! Not dead in the first hours of her life, as my cruel sister told me, but sternly nurtured by her, after she had renounced me and my name! O my child, O my child!”

CHAPTER XXX

Esther’s Narrative

RICHARD HAD BEEN GONE away some time when a visitor came to pass a few days with us. It was an elderly lady. It was Mrs. Woodcourt, who, having come from Wales to stay with Mrs. Bayham Badger and having written to my guardian, “by her son Allan’s desire,” to report that she had heard from him and that he was well “and sent his kind remembrances to all of us,” had been invited by my guardian to make a visit to Bleak House. She stayed with us nearly three weeks. She took very kindly to me and was extremely confidential, so much so that sometimes she almost made me uncomfortable. I had no right, I knew very well, to be uncomfortable because she confided in me, and I felt it was unreasonable; still, with all I could do, I could not quite help it.

She was such a sharp little lady and used to sit with her hands folded in each other looking so very watchful while she talked to me that perhaps I found that rather irksome. Or perhaps it was her being so upright and trim, though I don’t think it was that, because I thought that quaintly pleasant. Nor can it have been the general expression of her face, which was very sparkling and pretty for an old lady. I don’t know what it was. Or at least if I do now, I thought I did not then. Or at least—but it don’t matter.

Of a night when I was going upstairs to bed, she would invite me into her room, where she sat before the fire in a great chair; and, dear me, she would tell me about Morgan ap-Kerrig until I was quite low-spirited! Sometimes she recited a few verses from Crumlinwallinwer and the Mewlinnwillinwodd (if those are the right names, which I dare say they are not), and would become quite fiery with the sentiments they expressed. Though I never knew what they were (being in Welsh), further than that they were highly eulogistic of the lineage of Morgan ap-Kerrig.

“So, Miss Summerson,” she would say to me with stately triumph, “this, you see, is the fortune inherited by my son. Wherever my son goes, he can claim kindred with Ap-Kerrig. He may not have money, but he always has

what is much better—family, my dear."

I had my doubts of their caring so very much for Morgan ap-Kerrig in India and China, but of course I never expressed them. I used to say it was a great thing to be so highly connected.

"It IS, my dear, a great thing," Mrs. Woodcourt would reply. "It has its disadvantages; my son's choice of a wife, for instance, is limited by it, but the matrimonial choice of the royal family is limited in much the same manner."

Then she would pat me on the arm and smooth my dress, as much as to assure me that she had a good opinion of me, the distance between us notwithstanding.

"Poor Mr. Woodcourt, my dear," she would say, and always with some emotion, for with her lofty pedigree she had a very affectionate heart, "was descended from a great Highland family, the MacCoorts of MacCoort. He served his king and country as an officer in the Royal Highlanders, and he died on the field. My son is one of the last representatives of two old families. With the blessing of heaven he will set them up again and unite them with another old family."

It was in vain for me to try to change the subject, as I used to try, only for the sake of novelty or perhaps because—but I need not be so particular. Mrs. Woodcourt never would let me change it.

"My dear," she said one night, "you have so much sense and you look at the world in a quiet manner so superior to your time of life that it is a comfort to me to talk to you about these family matters of mine. You don't know much of my son, my dear; but you know enough of him, I dare say, to recollect him?"

"Yes, ma'am. I recollect him."

"Yes, my dear. Now, my dear, I think you are a judge of character, and I should like to have your opinion of him."

"Oh, Mrs. Woodcourt," said I, "that is so difficult!"

"Why is it so difficult, my dear?" she returned. "I don't see it myself."

"To give an opinion—"

"On so slight an acquaintance, my dear. THAT'S true."

I didn't mean that, because Mr. Woodcourt had been at our house a good deal altogether and had become quite intimate with my guardian. I said so, and added that he seemed to be very clever in his profession—we thought

—and that his kindness and gentleness to Miss Flite were above all praise.

"You do him justice!" said Mrs. Woodcourt, pressing my hand. "You define him exactly. Allan is a dear fellow, and in his profession faultless. I say it, though I am his mother. Still, I must confess he is not without faults, love."

"None of us are," said I.

"Ah! But his really are faults that he might correct, and ought to correct," returned the sharp old lady, sharply shaking her head. "I am so much attached to you that I may confide in you, my dear, as a third party wholly disinterested, that he is fickleness itself."

I said I should have thought it hardly possible that he could have been otherwise than constant to his profession and zealous in the pursuit of it, judging from the reputation he had earned.

"You are right again, my dear," the old lady retorted, "but I don't refer to his profession, look you."

"Oh!" said I.

"No," said she. "I refer, my dear, to his social conduct. He is always paying trivial attentions to young ladies, and always has been, ever since he was eighteen. Now, my dear, he has never really cared for any one of them and has never meant in doing this to do any harm or to express anything but politeness and good nature. Still, it's not right, you know; is it?"

"No," said I, as she seemed to wait for me.

"And it might lead to mistaken notions, you see, my dear."

I supposed it might.

"Therefore, I have told him many times that he really should be more careful, both in justice to himself and in justice to others. And he has always said, 'Mother, I will be; but you know me better than anybody else does, and you know I mean no harm—in short, mean nothing.' All of which is very true, my dear, but is no justification. However, as he is now gone so far away and for an indefinite time, and as he will have good opportunities and introductions, we may consider this past and gone. And you, my dear," said the old lady, who was now all nods and smiles, "regarding your dear self, my love?"

"Me, Mrs. Woodcourt?"

"Not to be always selfish, talking of my son, who has gone to seek his fortune and to find a wife—when do you mean to seek YOUR fortune and to

find a husband, Miss Summerson? Hey, look you! Now you blush!”

I don’t think I did blush—at all events, it was not important if I did—and I said my present fortune perfectly contented me and I had no wish to change it.

“Shall I tell you what I always think of you and the fortune yet to come for you, my love?” said Mrs. Woodcourt.

“If you believe you are a good prophet,” said I.

“Why, then, it is that you will marry some one very rich and very worthy, much older—five and twenty years, perhaps—than yourself. And you will be an excellent wife, and much beloved, and very happy.”

“That is a good fortune,” said I. “But why is it to be mine?”

“My dear,” she returned, “there’s suitability in it—you are so busy, and so neat, and so peculiarly situated altogether that there’s suitability in it, and it will come to pass. And nobody, my love, will congratulate you more sincerely on such a marriage than I shall.”

It was curious that this should make me uncomfortable, but I think it did. I know it did. It made me for some part of that night uncomfortable. I was so ashamed of my folly that I did not like to confess it even to Ada, and that made me more uncomfortable still. I would have given anything not to have been so much in the bright old lady’s confidence if I could have possibly declined it. It gave me the most inconsistent opinions of her. At one time I thought she was a story-teller, and at another time that she was the pink of truth. Now I suspected that she was very cunning, next moment I believed her honest Welsh heart to be perfectly innocent and simple. And after all, what did it matter to me, and why did it matter to me? Why could not I, going up to bed with my basket of keys, stop to sit down by her fire and accommodate myself for a little while to her, at least as well as to anybody else, and not trouble myself about the harmless things she said to me? Impelled towards her, as I certainly was, for I was very anxious that she should like me and was very glad indeed that she did, why should I harp afterwards, with actual distress and pain, on every word she said and weigh it over and over again in twenty scales? Why was it so worrying to me to have her in our house, and confidential to me every night, when I yet felt that it was better and safer somehow that she should be there than anywhere else? These were perplexities and contradictions that I could not account for. At least, if I could—but I shall come to all that by and by, and it is mere

idleness to go on about it now.

So when Mrs. Woodcourt went away, I was sorry to lose her but was relieved too. And then Caddy Jellyby came down, and Caddy brought such a packet of domestic news that it gave us abundant occupation.

First Caddy declared (and would at first declare nothing else) that I was the best adviser that ever was known. This, my pet said, was no news at all; and this, I said, of course, was nonsense. Then Caddy told us that she was going to be married in a month and that if Ada and I would be her bridesmaids, she was the happiest girl in the world. To be sure, this was news indeed; and I thought we never should have done talking about it, we had so much to say to Caddy, and Caddy had so much to say to us.

It seemed that Caddy's unfortunate papa had got over his bankruptcy —"gone through the Gazette," was the expression Caddy used, as if it were a tunnel—with the general clemency and commiseration of his creditors, and had got rid of his affairs in some blessed manner without succeeding in understanding them, and had given up everything he possessed (which was not worth much, I should think, to judge from the state of the furniture), and had satisfied every one concerned that he could do no more, poor man. So, he had been honourably dismissed to "the office" to begin the world again. What he did at the office, I never knew; Caddy said he was a "custom-house and general agent," and the only thing I ever understood about that business was that when he wanted money more than usual he went to the docks to look for it, and hardly ever found it.

As soon as her papa had tranquillized his mind by becoming this shorn lamb, and they had removed to a furnished lodging in Hatton Garden (where I found the children, when I afterwards went there, cutting the horse hair out of the seats of the chairs and choking themselves with it), Caddy had brought about a meeting between him and old Mr. Turveydrop; and poor Mr. Jellyby, being very humble and meek, had deferred to Mr. Turveydrop's deportment so submissively that they had become excellent friends. By degrees, old Mr. Turveydrop, thus familiarized with the idea of his son's marriage, had worked up his parental feelings to the height of contemplating that event as being near at hand and had given his gracious consent to the young couple commencing housekeeping at the academy in Newman Street when they would.

"And your papa, Caddy. What did he say?"

“Oh! Poor Pa,” said Caddy, “only cried and said he hoped we might get on better than he and Ma had got on. He didn’t say so before Prince, he only said so to me. And he said, ‘My poor girl, you have not been very well taught how to make a home for your husband, but unless you mean with all your heart to strive to do it, you had better murder him than marry him—if you really love him.’”

“And how did you reassure him, Caddy?”

“Why, it was very distressing, you know, to see poor Pa so low and hear him say such terrible things, and I couldn’t help crying myself. But I told him that I DID mean it with all my heart and that I hoped our house would be a place for him to come and find some comfort in of an evening and that I hoped and thought I could be a better daughter to him there than at home. Then I mentioned Peepy’s coming to stay with me, and then Pa began to cry again and said the children were Indians.”

“Indians, Caddy?”

“Yes,” said Caddy, “wild Indians. And Pa said”—here she began to sob, poor girl, not at all like the happiest girl in the world—“that he was sensible the best thing that could happen to them was their being all tomahawked together.”

Ada suggested that it was comfortable to know that Mr. Jellyby did not mean these destructive sentiments.

“No, of course I know Pa wouldn’t like his family to be weltering in their blood,” said Caddy, “but he means that they are very unfortunate in being Ma’s children and that he is very unfortunate in being Ma’s husband; and I am sure that’s true, though it seems unnatural to say so.”

I asked Caddy if Mrs. Jellyby knew that her wedding-day was fixed.

“Oh! You know what Ma is, Esther,” she returned. “It’s impossible to say whether she knows it or not. She has been told it often enough; and when she IS told it, she only gives me a placid look, as if I was I don’t know what—a steeple in the distance,” said Caddy with a sudden idea; “and then she shakes her head and says ‘Oh, Caddy, Caddy, what a tease you are!’ and goes on with the Borrioboola letters.”

“And about your wardrobe, Caddy?” said I. For she was under no restraint with us.

“Well, my dear Esther,” she returned, drying her eyes, “I must do the best I can and trust to my dear Prince never to have an unkind remembrance

of my coming so shabbily to him. If the question concerned an outfit for Borrioboola, Ma would know all about it and would be quite excited. Being what it is, she neither knows nor cares."

Caddy was not at all deficient in natural affection for her mother, but mentioned this with tears as an undeniable fact, which I am afraid it was. We were sorry for the poor dear girl and found so much to admire in the good disposition which had survived under such discouragement that we both at once (I mean Ada and I) proposed a little scheme that made her perfectly joyful. This was her staying with us for three weeks, my staying with her for one, and our all three contriving and cutting out, and repairing, and sewing, and saving, and doing the very best we could think of to make the most of her stock. My guardian being as pleased with the idea as Caddy was, we took her home next day to arrange the matter and brought her out again in triumph with her boxes and all the purchases that could be squeezed out of a ten-pound note, which Mr. Jellyby had found in the docks I suppose, but which he at all events gave her. What my guardian would not have given her if we had encouraged him, it would be difficult to say, but we thought it right to compound for no more than her wedding-dress and bonnet. He agreed to this compromise, and if Caddy had ever been happy in her life, she was happy when we sat down to work.

She was clumsy enough with her needle, poor girl, and pricked her fingers as much as she had been used to ink them. She could not help reddening a little now and then, partly with the smart and partly with vexation at being able to do no better, but she soon got over that and began to improve rapidly. So day after day she, and my darling, and my little maid Charley, and a milliner out of the town, and I, sat hard at work, as pleasantly as possible.

Over and above this, Caddy was very anxious "to learn housekeeping," as she said. Now, mercy upon us! The idea of her learning housekeeping of a person of my vast experience was such a joke that I laughed, and coloured up, and fell into a comical confusion when she proposed it. However, I said, "Caddy, I am sure you are very welcome to learn anything that you can learn of ME, my dear," and I showed her all my books and methods and all my fidgety ways. You would have supposed that I was showing her some wonderful inventions, by her study of them; and if you had seen her, whenever I jingled my housekeeping keys, get up and attend me, certainly

you might have thought that there never was a greater imposter than I with a blinder follower than Caddy Jellyby.

So what with working and housekeeping, and lessons to Charley, and backgammon in the evening with my guardian, and duets with Ada, the three weeks slipped fast away. Then I went home with Caddy to see what could be done there, and Ada and Charley remained behind to take care of my guardian.

When I say I went home with Caddy, I mean to the furnished lodging in Hatton Garden. We went to Newman Street two or three times, where preparations were in progress too—a good many, I observed, for enhancing the comforts of old Mr. Turveydrop, and a few for putting the newly married couple away cheaply at the top of the house—but our great point was to make the furnished lodging decent for the wedding-breakfast and to imbue Mrs. Jellyby beforehand with some faint sense of the occasion.

The latter was the more difficult thing of the two because Mrs. Jellyby and an unwholesome boy occupied the front sitting-room (the back one was a mere closet), and it was littered down with waste-paper and Borrioboolan documents, as an untidy stable might be littered with straw. Mrs. Jellyby sat there all day drinking strong coffee, dictating, and holding Borrioboolan interviews by appointment. The unwholesome boy, who seemed to me to be going into a decline, took his meals out of the house. When Mr. Jellyby came home, he usually groaned and went down into the kitchen. There he got something to eat if the servant would give him anything, and then, feeling that he was in the way, went out and walked about Hatton Garden in the wet. The poor children scrambled up and tumbled down the house as they had always been accustomed to do.

The production of these devoted little sacrifices in any presentable condition being quite out of the question at a week’s notice, I proposed to Caddy that we should make them as happy as we could on her marriage morning in the attic where they all slept, and should confine our greatest efforts to her mama and her mama’s room, and a clean breakfast. In truth Mrs. Jellyby required a good deal of attention, the lattice-work up her back having widened considerably since I first knew her and her hair looking like the mane of a dustman’s horse.

Thinking that the display of Caddy’s wardrobe would be the best means of approaching the subject, I invited Mrs. Jellyby to come and look at it

spread out on Caddy's bed in the evening after the unwholesome boy was gone.

"My dear Miss Summerson," said she, rising from her desk with her usual sweetness of temper, "these are really ridiculous preparations, though your assisting them is a proof of your kindness. There is something so inexpressibly absurd to me in the idea of Caddy being married! Oh, Caddy, you silly, silly, silly puss!"

She came upstairs with us notwithstanding and looked at the clothes in her customary far-off manner. They suggested one distinct idea to her, for she said with her placid smile, and shaking her head, "My good Miss Summerson, at half the cost, this weak child might have been equipped for Africa!"

On our going downstairs again, Mrs. Jellyby asked me whether this troublesome business was really to take place next Wednesday. And on my replying yes, she said, "Will my room be required, my dear Miss Summerson? For it's quite impossible that I can put my papers away."

I took the liberty of saying that the room would certainly be wanted and that I thought we must put the papers away somewhere. "Well, my dear Miss Summerson," said Mrs. Jellyby, "you know best, I dare say. But by obliging me to employ a boy, Caddy has embarrassed me to that extent, overwhelmed as I am with public business, that I don't know which way to turn. We have a Ramification meeting, too, on Wednesday afternoon, and the inconvenience is very serious."

"It is not likely to occur again," said I, smiling. "Caddy will be married but once, probably."

"That's true," Mrs. Jellyby replied; "that's true, my dear. I suppose we must make the best of it!"

The next question was how Mrs. Jellyby should be dressed on the occasion. I thought it very curious to see her looking on serenely from her writing-table while Caddy and I discussed it, occasionally shaking her head at us with a half-reproachful smile like a superior spirit who could just bear with our trifling.

The state in which her dresses were, and the extraordinary confusion in which she kept them, added not a little to our difficulty; but at length we devised something not very unlike what a common-place mother might wear on such an occasion. The abstracted manner in which Mrs. Jellyby

would deliver herself up to having this attire tried on by the dressmaker, and the sweetness with which she would then observe to me how sorry she was that I had not turned my thoughts to Africa, were consistent with the rest of her behaviour.

The lodging was rather confined as to space, but I fancied that if Mrs. Jellyby's household had been the only lodgers in Saint Paul's or Saint Peter's, the sole advantage they would have found in the size of the building would have been its affording a great deal of room to be dirty in. I believe that nothing belonging to the family which it had been possible to break was unbroken at the time of those preparations for Caddy's marriage, that nothing which it had been possible to spoil in any way was unspoilt, and that no domestic object which was capable of collecting dirt, from a dear child's knee to the door-plate, was without as much dirt as could well accumulate upon it.

Poor Mr. Jellyby, who very seldom spoke and almost always sat when he was at home with his head against the wall, became interested when he saw that Caddy and I were attempting to establish some order among all this waste and ruin and took off his coat to help. But such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened—bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs. Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar in odds and ends of paper bags, footstools, blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs. Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered candle ends put out by being turned upside down in broken candlesticks, nutshells, heads and tails of shrimps, dinner-mats, gloves, coffee-grounds, umbrellas—that he looked frightened, and left off again. But he came regularly every evening and sat without his coat, with his head against the wall, as though he would have helped us if he had known how.

"Poor Pa!" said Caddy to me on the night before the great day, when we really had got things a little to rights. "It seems unkind to leave him, Esther. But what could I do if I stayed! Since I first knew you, I have tidied and tidied over and over again, but it's useless. Ma and Africa, together, upset the whole house directly. We never have a servant who don't drink. Ma's ruinous to everything."

Mr. Jellyby could not hear what she said, but he seemed very low indeed and shed tears, I thought.

“My heart aches for him; that it does!” sobbed Caddy. “I can’t help thinking to-night, Esther, how dearly I hope to be happy with Prince, and how dearly Pa hoped, I dare say, to be happy with Ma. What a disappointed life!”

“My dear Caddy!” said Mr. Jellyby, looking slowly round from the wail. It was the first time, I think, I ever heard him say three words together.

“Yes, Pa!” cried Caddy, going to him and embracing him affectionately.

“My dear Caddy,” said Mr. Jellyby. “Never have—”

“Not Prince, Pa?” faltered Caddy. “Not have Prince?”

“Yes, my dear,” said Mr. Jellyby. “Have him, certainly. But, never have __”

I mentioned in my account of our first visit in Thavies Inn that Richard described Mr. Jellyby as frequently opening his mouth after dinner without saying anything. It was a habit of his. He opened his mouth now a great many times and shook his head in a melancholy manner.

“What do you wish me not to have? Don’t have what, dear Pa?” asked Caddy, coaxing him, with her arms round his neck.

“Never have a mission, my dear child.”

Mr. Jellyby groaned and laid his head against the wall again, and this was the only time I ever heard him make any approach to expressing his sentiments on the Borrioboolan question. I suppose he had been more talkative and lively once, but he seemed to have been completely exhausted long before I knew him.

I thought Mrs. Jellyby never would have left off serenely looking over her papers and drinking coffee that night. It was twelve o’clock before we could obtain possession of the room, and the clearance it required then was so discouraging that Caddy, who was almost tired out, sat down in the middle of the dust and cried. But she soon cheered up, and we did wonders with it before we went to bed.

In the morning it looked, by the aid of a few flowers and a quantity of soap and water and a little arrangement, quite gay. The plain breakfast made a cheerful show, and Caddy was perfectly charming. But when my darling came, I thought—and I think now—that I never had seen such a dear face as my beautiful pet’s.

We made a little feast for the children upstairs, and we put Peepy at the head of the table, and we showed them Caddy in her bridal dress, and they

clapped their hands and hurrahed, and Caddy cried to think that she was going away from them and hugged them over and over again until we brought Prince up to fetch her away—when, I am sorry to say, Peepy bit him. Then there was old Mr. Turveydrop downstairs, in a state of deportment not to be expressed, benignly blessing Caddy and giving my guardian to understand that his son's happiness was his own parental work and that he sacrificed personal considerations to ensure it. "My dear sir," said Mr. Turveydrop, "these young people will live with me; my house is large enough for their accommodation, and they shall not want the shelter of my roof. I could have wished—you will understand the allusion, Mr. Jarndyce, for you remember my illustrious patron the Prince Regent—I could have wished that my son had married into a family where there was more deportment, but the will of heaven be done!"

Mr. and Mrs. Pardiggle were of the party—Mr. Pardiggle, an obstinate-looking man with a large waistcoat and stubbly hair, who was always talking in a loud bass voice about his mite, or Mrs. Pardiggle's mite, or their five boys' mites. Mr. Quale, with his hair brushed back as usual and his knobs of temples shining very much, was also there, not in the character of a disappointed lover, but as the accepted of a young—at least, an unmarried—lady, a Miss Wisk, who was also there. Miss Wisk's mission, my guardian said, was to show the world that woman's mission was man's mission and that the only genuine mission of both man and woman was to be always moving declaratory resolutions about things in general at public meetings. The guests were few, but were, as one might expect at Mrs. Jellyby's, all devoted to public objects only. Besides those I have mentioned, there was an extremely dirty lady with her bonnet all awry and the ticketed price of her dress still sticking on it, whose neglected home, Caddy told me, was like a filthy wilderness, but whose church was like a fancy fair. A very contentious gentleman, who said it was his mission to be everybody's brother but who appeared to be on terms of coolness with the whole of his large family, completed the party.

A party, having less in common with such an occasion, could hardly have been got together by any ingenuity. Such a mean mission as the domestic mission was the very last thing to be endured among them; indeed, Miss Wisk informed us, with great indignation, before we sat down to breakfast, that the idea of woman's mission lying chiefly in the narrow

sphere of home was an outrageous slander on the part of her tyrant, man. One other singularity was that nobody with a mission—except Mr. Quale, whose mission, as I think I have formerly said, was to be in ecstasies with everybody's mission—cared at all for anybody's mission. Mrs. Pardiggle being as clear that the only one infallible course was her course of pouncing upon the poor and applying benevolence to them like a strait-waistcoat; as Miss Wisk was that the only practical thing for the world was the emancipation of woman from the thraldom of her tyrant, man. Mrs. Jellyby, all the while, sat smiling at the limited vision that could see anything but Borrioboola-Gha.

But I am anticipating now the purport of our conversation on the ride home instead of first marrying Caddy. We all went to church, and Mr. Jellyby gave her away. Of the air with which old Mr. Turveydrop, with his hat under his left arm (the inside presented at the clergyman like a cannon) and his eyes creasing themselves up into his wig, stood stiff and high-shouldered behind us bridesmaids during the ceremony, and afterwards saluted us, I could never say enough to do it justice. Miss Wisk, whom I cannot report as prepossessing in appearance, and whose manner was grim, listened to the proceedings, as part of woman's wrongs, with a disdainful face. Mrs. Jellyby, with her calm smile and her bright eyes, looked the least concerned of all the company.

We duly came back to breakfast, and Mrs. Jellyby sat at the head of the table and Mr. Jellyby at the foot. Caddy had previously stolen upstairs to hug the children again and tell them that her name was Turveydrop. But this piece of information, instead of being an agreeable surprise to Peepy, threw him on his back in such transports of kicking grief that I could do nothing on being sent for but accede to the proposal that he should be admitted to the breakfast table. So he came down and sat in my lap; and Mrs. Jellyby, after saying, in reference to the state of his pinafore, "Oh, you naughty Peepy, what a shocking little pig you are!" was not at all discomposed. He was very good except that he brought down Noah with him (out of an ark I had given him before we went to church) and WOULD dip him head first into the wine-glasses and then put him in his mouth.

My guardian, with his sweet temper and his quick perception and his amiable face, made something agreeable even out of the ungenial company. None of them seemed able to talk about anything but his, or her, own one

subject, and none of them seemed able to talk about even that as part of a world in which there was anything else; but my guardian turned it all to the merry encouragement of Caddy and the honour of the occasion, and brought us through the breakfast nobly. What we should have done without him, I am afraid to think, for all the company despising the bride and bridegroom and old Mr. Turveydrop—and old Mr. Thurveydrop, in virtue of his deportment, considering himself vastly superior to all the company—it was a very unpromising case.

At last the time came when poor Caddy was to go and when all her property was packed on the hired coach and pair that was to take her and her husband to Gravesend. It affected us to see Caddy clinging, then, to her deplorable home and hanging on her mother's neck with the greatest tenderness.

"I am very sorry I couldn't go on writing from dictation, Ma," sobbed Caddy. "I hope you forgive me now."

"Oh, Caddy, Caddy!" said Mrs. Jellyby. "I have told you over and over again that I have engaged a boy, and there's an end of it."

"You are sure you are not the least angry with me, Ma? Say you are sure before I go away, Ma?"

"You foolish Caddy," returned Mrs. Jellyby, "do I look angry, or have I inclination to be angry, or time to be angry? How CAN you?"

"Take a little care of Pa while I am gone, Mama!"

Mrs. Jellyby positively laughed at the fancy. "You romantic child," said she, lightly patting Caddy's back. "Go along. I am excellent friends with you. Now, good-bye, Caddy, and be very happy!"

Then Caddy hung upon her father and nursed his cheek against hers as if he were some poor dull child in pain. All this took place in the hall. Her father released her, took out his pocket handkerchief, and sat down on the stairs with his head against the wall. I hope he found some consolation in walls. I almost think he did.

And then Prince took her arm in his and turned with great emotion and respect to his father, whose deportment at that moment was overwhelming.

"Thank you over and over again, father!" said Prince, kissing his hand. "I am very grateful for all your kindness and consideration regarding our marriage, and so, I can assure you, is Caddy."

"Very," sobbed Caddy. "Ve-ry!"

“My dear son,” said Mr. Turveydrop, “and dear daughter, I have done my duty. If the spirit of a sainted wooman hovers above us and looks down on the occasion, that, and your constant affection, will be my recompense. You will not fail in YOUR duty, my son and daughter, I believe?”

“Dear father, never!” cried Prince.

“Never, never, dear Mr. Turveydrop!” said Caddy.

“This,” returned Mr. Turveydrop, “is as it should be. My children, my home is yours, my heart is yours, my all is yours. I will never leave you; nothing but death shall part us. My dear son, you contemplate an absence of a week, I think?”

“A week, dear father. We shall return home this day week.”

“My dear child,” said Mr. Turveydrop, “let me, even under the present exceptional circumstances, recommend strict punctuality. It is highly important to keep the connexion together; and schools, if at all neglected, are apt to take offence.”

“This day week, father, we shall be sure to be home to dinner.”

“Good!” said Mr. Turveydrop. “You will find fires, my dear Caroline, in your own room, and dinner prepared in my apartment. Yes, yes, Prince!” anticipating some self-denying objection on his son’s part with a great air. “You and our Caroline will be strange in the upper part of the premises and will, therefore, dine that day in my apartment. Now, bless ye!”

They drove away, and whether I wondered most at Mrs. Jellyby or at Mr. Turveydrop, I did not know. Ada and my guardian were in the same condition when we came to talk it over. But before we drove away too, I received a most unexpected and eloquent compliment from Mr. Jellyby. He came up to me in the hall, took both my hands, pressed them earnestly, and opened his mouth twice. I was so sure of his meaning that I said, quite flurried, “You are very welcome, sir. Pray don’t mention it!”

“I hope this marriage is for the best, guardian,” said I when we three were on our road home.

“I hope it is, little woman. Patience. We shall see.”

“Is the wind in the east to-day?” I ventured to ask him.

He laughed heartily and answered, “No.”

“But it must have been this morning, I think,” said I.

He answered “No” again, and this time my dear girl confidently answered “No” too and shook the lovely head which, with its blooming

flowers against the golden hair, was like the very spring. “Much YOU know of east winds, my ugly darling,” said I, kissing her in my admiration—I couldn’t help it.

Well! It was only their love for me, I know very well, and it is a long time ago. I must write it even if I rub it out again, because it gives me so much pleasure. They said there could be no east wind where Somebody was; they said that wherever Dame Durden went, there was sunshine and summer air.

CHAPTER XXXI

Nurse and Patient

I HAD NOT BEEN at home again many days when one evening I went upstairs into my own room to take a peep over Charley's shoulder and see how she was getting on with her copy-book. Writing was a trying business to Charley, who seemed to have no natural power over a pen, but in whose hand every pen appeared to become perversely animated, and to go wrong and crooked, and to stop, and splash, and sidle into corners like a saddle-donkey. It was very odd to see what old letters Charley's young hand had made, they so wrinkled, and shrivelled, and tottering, it so plump and round. Yet Charley was uncommonly expert at other things and had as nimble little fingers as I ever watched.

"Well, Charley," said I, looking over a copy of the letter O in which it was represented as square, triangular, pear-shaped, and collapsed in all kinds of ways, "we are improving. If we only get to make it round, we shall be perfect, Charley."

Then I made one, and Charley made one, and the pen wouldn't join Charley's neatly, but twisted it up into a knot.

"Never mind, Charley. We shall do it in time."

Charley laid down her pen, the copy being finished, opened and shut her cramped little hand, looked gravely at the page, half in pride and half in doubt, and got up, and dropped me a curtsy.

"Thank you, miss. If you please, miss, did you know a poor person of the name of Jenny?"

"A brickmaker's wife, Charley? Yes."

"She came and spoke to me when I was out a little while ago, and said you knew her, miss. She asked me if I wasn't the young lady's little maid—meaning you for the young lady, miss—and I said yes, miss."

"I thought she had left this neighbourhood altogether, Charley."

"So she had, miss, but she's come back again to where she used to live—she and Liz. Did you know another poor person of the name of Liz, miss?"

“I think I do, Charley, though not by name.”

“That’s what she said!” returned Charley. “They have both come back, miss, and have been tramping high and low.”

“Tramping high and low, have they, Charley?”

“Yes, miss.” If Charley could only have made the letters in her copy as round as the eyes with which she looked into my face, they would have been excellent. “And this poor person came about the house three or four days, hoping to get a glimpse of you, miss—all she wanted, she said—but you were away. That was when she saw me. She saw me a-going about, miss,” said Charley with a short laugh of the greatest delight and pride, “and she thought I looked like your maid!”

“Did she though, really, Charley?”

“Yes, miss!” said Charley. “Really and truly.” And Charley, with another short laugh of the purest glee, made her eyes very round again and looked as serious as became my maid. I was never tired of seeing Charley in the full enjoyment of that great dignity, standing before me with her youthful face and figure, and her steady manner, and her childish exultation breaking through it now and then in the pleasantest way.

“And where did you see her, Charley?” said I.

My little maid’s countenance fell as she replied, “By the doctor’s shop, miss.” For Charley wore her black frock yet.

I asked if the brickmaker’s wife were ill, but Charley said no. It was some one else. Some one in her cottage who had tramped down to Saint Albans and was tramping he didn’t know where. A poor boy, Charley said. No father, no mother, no any one. “Like as Tom might have been, miss, if Emma and me had died after father,” said Charley, her round eyes filling with tears.

“And she was getting medicine for him, Charley?”

“She said, miss,” returned Charley, “how that he had once done as much for her.”

My little maid’s face was so eager and her quiet hands were folded so closely in one another as she stood looking at me that I had no great difficulty in reading her thoughts. “Well, Charley,” said I, “it appears to me that you and I can do no better than go round to Jenny’s and see what’s the matter.”

The alacrity with which Charley brought my bonnet and veil, and having

dressed me, quaintly pinned herself into her warm shawl and made herself look like a little old woman, sufficiently expressed her readiness. So Charley and I, without saying anything to any one, went out.

It was a cold, wild night, and the trees shuddered in the wind. The rain had been thick and heavy all day, and with little intermission for many days. None was falling just then, however. The sky had partly cleared, but was very gloomy—even above us, where a few stars were shining. In the north and north-west, where the sun had set three hours before, there was a pale dead light both beautiful and awful; and into it long sullen lines of cloud waved up like a sea stricken immovable as it was heaving. Towards London a lurid glare overhung the whole dark waste, and the contrast between these two lights, and the fancy which the redder light engendered of an unearthly fire, gleaming on all the unseen buildings of the city and on all the faces of its many thousands of wondering inhabitants, was as solemn as might be.

I had no thought that night—none, I am quite sure—of what was soon to happen to me. But I have always remembered since that when we had stopped at the garden-gate to look up at the sky, and when we went upon our way, I had for a moment an undefinable impression of myself as being something different from what I then was. I know it was then and there that I had it. I have ever since connected the feeling with that spot and time and with everything associated with that spot and time, to the distant voices in the town, the barking of a dog, and the sound of wheels coming down the miry hill.

It was Saturday night, and most of the people belonging to the place where we were going were drinking elsewhere. We found it quieter than I had previously seen it, though quite as miserable. The kilns were burning, and a stifling vapour set towards us with a pale-blue glare.

We came to the cottage, where there was a feeble candle in the patched window. We tapped at the door and went in. The mother of the little child who had died was sitting in a chair on one side of the poor fire by the bed; and opposite to her, a wretched boy, supported by the chimney-piece, was cowering on the floor. He held under his arm, like a little bundle, a fragment of a fur cap; and as he tried to warm himself, he shook until the crazy door and window shook. The place was closer than before and had an unhealthy and a very peculiar smell.

I had not lifted my veil when I first spoke to the woman, which was at

the moment of our going in. The boy staggered up instantly and stared at me with a remarkable expression of surprise and terror.

His action was so quick and my being the cause of it was so evident that I stood still instead of advancing nearer.

“I won’t go no more to the berryin ground,” muttered the boy; “I ain’t a-going there, so I tell you!”

I lifted my veil and spoke to the woman. She said to me in a low voice, “Don’t mind him, ma’am. He’ll soon come back to his head,” and said to him, “Jo, Jo, what’s the matter?”

“I know wot she’s come for!” cried the boy.

“Who?”

“The lady there. She’s come to get me to go along with her to the berryin ground. I won’t go to the berryin ground. I don’t like the name on it. She might go a-berryin ME.” His shivering came on again, and as he leaned against the wall, he shook the hovel.

“He has been talking off and on about such like all day, ma’am,” said Jenny softly. “Why, how you stare! This is MY lady, Jo.”

“Is it?” returned the boy doubtfully, and surveying me with his arm held out above his burning eyes. “She looks to me the t’other one. It ain’t the bonnet, nor yet it ain’t the gownd, but she looks to me the t’other one.”

My little Charley, with her premature experience of illness and trouble, had pulled off her bonnet and shawl and now went quietly up to him with a chair and sat him down in it like an old sick nurse. Except that no such attendant could have shown him Charley’s youthful face, which seemed to engage his confidence.

“I say!” said the boy. “YOU tell me. Ain’t the lady the t’other lady?”

Charley shook her head as she methodically drew his rags about him and made him as warm as she could.

“Oh!” the boy muttered. “Then I s’pose she ain’t.”

“I came to see if I could do you any good,” said I. “What is the matter with you?”

“I’m a-being froze,” returned the boy hoarsely, with his haggard gaze wandering about me, “and then burnt up, and then froze, and then burnt up, ever so many times in a hour. And my head’s all sleepy, and all a-going mad-like—and I’m so dry—and my bones isn’t half so much bones as pain.

“When did he come here?” I asked the woman.

“This morning, ma’am, I found him at the corner of the town. I had known him up in London yonder. Hadn’t I, Jo?”

“Tom-all-Alone’s,” the boy replied.

Whenever he fixed his attention or his eyes, it was only for a very little while. He soon began to droop his head again, and roll it heavily, and speak as if he were half awake.

“When did he come from London?” I asked.

“I come from London yes’day,” said the boy himself, now flushed and hot. “I’m a-going somewheres.”

“Where is he going?” I asked.

“Somewheres,” repeated the boy in a louder tone. “I have been moved on, and moved on, more nor ever I was afore, since the t’other one give me the sov’ring. Mrs. Snagsby, she’s always a-watching, and a-driving of me—what have I done to her?—and they’re all a-watching and a-driving of me. Every one of ’em’s doing of it, from the time when I don’t get up, to the time when I don’t go to bed. And I’m a-going somewheres. That’s where I’m a-going. She told me, down in Tom-all-Alone’s, as she came from Stolbuns, and so I took the Stolbuns Road. It’s as good as another.”

He always concluded by addressing Charley.

“What is to be done with him?” said I, taking the woman aside. “He could not travel in this state even if he had a purpose and knew where he was going!”

“I know no more, ma’am, than the dead,” she replied, glancing compassionately at him. “Perhaps the dead know better, if they could only tell us. I’ve kept him here all day for pity’s sake, and I’ve given him broth and physic, and Liz has gone to try if any one will take him in (here’s my pretty in the bed—her child, but I call it mine); but I can’t keep him long, for if my husband was to come home and find him here, he’d be rough in putting him out and might do him a hurt. Hark! Here comes Liz back!”

The other woman came hurriedly in as she spoke, and the boy got up with a half-obscured sense that he was expected to be going. When the little child awoke, and when and how Charley got at it, took it out of bed, and began to walk about hushing it, I don’t know. There she was, doing all this in a quiet motherly manner as if she were living in Mrs. Blinder’s attic with Tom and Emma again.

The friend had been here and there, and had been played about from

hand to hand, and had come back as she went. At first it was too early for the boy to be received into the proper refuge, and at last it was too late. One official sent her to another, and the other sent her back again to the first, and so backward and forward, until it appeared to me as if both must have been appointed for their skill in evading their duties instead of performing them. And now, after all, she said, breathing quickly, for she had been running and was frightened too, “Jenny, your master’s on the road home, and mine’s not far behind, and the Lord help the boy, for we can do no more for him!” They put a few halfpence together and hurried them into his hand, and so, in an oblivious, half-thankful, half-insensible way, he shuffled out of the house.

“Give me the child, my dear,” said its mother to Charley, “and thank you kindly too! Jenny, woman dear, good night! Young lady, if my master don’t fall out with me, I’ll look down by the kiln by and by, where the boy will be most like, and again in the morning!” She hurried off, and presently we passed her hushing and singing to her child at her own door and looking anxiously along the road for her drunken husband.

I was afraid of staying then to speak to either woman, lest I should bring her into trouble. But I said to Charley that we must not leave the boy to die. Charley, who knew what to do much better than I did, and whose quickness equalled her presence of mind, glided on before me, and presently we came up with Jo, just short of the brick-kiln.

I think he must have begun his journey with some small bundle under his arm and must have had it stolen or lost it. For he still carried his wretched fragment of fur cap like a bundle, though he went bare-headed through the rain, which now fell fast. He stopped when we called to him and again showed a dread of me when I came up, standing with his lustrous eyes fixed upon me, and even arrested in his shivering fit.

I asked him to come with us, and we would take care that he had some shelter for the night.

“I don’t want no shelter,” he said; “I can lay amongst the warm bricks.”

“But don’t you know that people die there?” replied Charley.

“They dies everywheres,” said the boy. “They dies in their lodgings—she knows where; I showed her—and they dies down in Tom-all-Alone’s in heaps. They dies more than they lives, according to what I see.” Then he hoarsely whispered Charley, “If she ain’t the t’other one, she ain’t the

forrenner. Is there THREE of ’em then?”

Charley looked at me a little frightened. I felt half frightened at myself when the boy glared on me so.

But he turned and followed when I beckoned to him, and finding that he acknowledged that influence in me, I led the way straight home. It was not far, only at the summit of the hill. We passed but one man. I doubted if we should have got home without assistance, the boy’s steps were so uncertain and tremulous. He made no complaint, however, and was strangely unconcerned about himself, if I may say so strange a thing.

Leaving him in the hall for a moment, shrunk into the corner of the window-seat and staring with an indifference that scarcely could be called wonder at the comfort and brightness about him, I went into the drawing-room to speak to my guardian. There I found Mr. Skimpole, who had come down by the coach, as he frequently did without notice, and never bringing any clothes with him, but always borrowing everything he wanted.

They came out with me directly to look at the boy. The servants had gathered in the hall too, and he shivered in the window-seat with Charley standing by him, like some wounded animal that had been found in a ditch.

“This is a sorrowful case,” said my guardian after asking him a question or two and touching him and examining his eyes. “What do you say, Harold?”

“You had better turn him out,” said Mr. Skimpole.

“What do you mean?” inquired my guardian, almost sternly.

“My dear Jarndyce,” said Mr. Skimpole, “you know what I am: I am a child. Be cross to me if I deserve it. But I have a constitutional objection to this sort of thing. I always had, when I was a medical man. He’s not safe, you know. There’s a very bad sort of fever about him.”

Mr. Skimpole had retreated from the hall to the drawing-room again and said this in his airy way, seated on the music-stool as we stood by.

“You’ll say it’s childish,” observed Mr. Skimpole, looking gaily at us. “Well, I dare say it may be; but I AM a child, and I never pretend to be anything else. If you put him out in the road, you only put him where he was before. He will be no worse off than he was, you know. Even make him better off, if you like. Give him sixpence, or five shillings, or five pound ten —you are arithmeticians, and I am not—and get rid of him!”

“And what is he to do then?” asked my guardian.

“Upon my life,” said Mr. Skimpole, shrugging his shoulders with his engaging smile, “I have not the least idea what he is to do then. But I have no doubt he’ll do it.”

“Now, is it not a horrible reflection,” said my guardian, to whom I had hastily explained the unavailing efforts of the two women, “is it not a horrible reflection,” walking up and down and rumpling his hair, “that if this wretched creature were a convicted prisoner, his hospital would be wide open to him, and he would be as well taken care of as any sick boy in the kingdom?”

“My dear Jarndyce,” returned Mr. Skimpole, “you’ll pardon the simplicity of the question, coming as it does from a creature who is perfectly simple in worldly matters, but why ISN’T he a prisoner then?”

My guardian stopped and looked at him with a whimsical mixture of amusement and indignation in his face.

“Our young friend is not to be suspected of any delicacy, I should imagine,” said Mr. Skimpole, unabashed and candid. “It seems to me that it would be wiser, as well as in a certain kind of way more respectable, if he showed some misdirected energy that got him into prison. There would be more of an adventurous spirit in it, and consequently more of a certain sort of poetry.”

“I believe,” returned my guardian, resuming his uneasy walk, “that there is not such another child on earth as yourself.”

“Do you really?” said Mr. Skimpole. “I dare say! But I confess I don’t see why our young friend, in his degree, should not seek to invest himself with such poetry as is open to him. He is no doubt born with an appetite—probably, when he is in a safer state of health, he has an excellent appetite. Very well. At our young friend’s natural dinner hour, most likely about noon, our young friend says in effect to society, ‘I am hungry; will you have the goodness to produce your spoon and feed me?’ Society, which has taken upon itself the general arrangement of the whole system of spoons and professes to have a spoon for our young friend, does NOT produce that spoon; and our young friend, therefore, says ‘You really must excuse me if I seize it.’ Now, this appears to me a case of misdirected energy, which has a certain amount of reason in it and a certain amount of romance; and I don’t know but what I should be more interested in our young friend, as an illustration of such a case, than merely as a poor vagabond—which any one

can be."

"In the meantime," I ventured to observe, "he is getting worse."

"In the meantime," said Mr. Skimpole cheerfully, "as Miss Summerson, with her practical good sense, observes, he is getting worse. Therefore I recommend your turning him out before he gets still worse."

The amiable face with which he said it, I think I shall never forget.

"Of course, little woman," observed my guardian, turning to me, "I can ensure his admission into the proper place by merely going there to enforce it, though it's a bad state of things when, in his condition, that is necessary. But it's growing late, and is a very bad night, and the boy is worn out already. There is a bed in the wholesome loft-room by the stable; we had better keep him there till morning, when he can be wrapped up and removed. We'll do that."

"Oh!" said Mr. Skimpole, with his hands upon the keys of the piano as we moved away. "Are you going back to our young friend?"

"Yes," said my guardian.

"How I envy you your constitution, Jarndyce!" returned Mr. Skimpole with playful admiration. "You don't mind these things; neither does Miss Summerson. You are ready at all times to go anywhere, and do anything. Such is will! I have no will at all—and no won't—simply can't."

"You can't recommend anything for the boy, I suppose?" said my guardian, looking back over his shoulder half angrily; only half angrily, for he never seemed to consider Mr. Skimpole an accountable being.

"My dear Jarndyce, I observed a bottle of cooling medicine in his pocket, and it's impossible for him to do better than take it. You can tell them to sprinkle a little vinegar about the place where he sleeps and to keep it moderately cool and him moderately warm. But it is mere impertinence in me to offer any recommendation. Miss Summerson has such a knowledge of detail and such a capacity for the administration of detail that she knows all about it."

We went back into the hall and explained to Jo what we proposed to do, which Charley explained to him again and which he received with the languid unconcern I had already noticed, wearily looking on at what was done as if it were for somebody else. The servants compassionating his miserable state and being very anxious to help, we soon got the loft-room ready; and some of the men about the house carried him across the wet

yard, well wrapped up. It was pleasant to observe how kind they were to him and how there appeared to be a general impression among them that frequently calling him “Old Chap” was likely to revive his spirits. Charley directed the operations and went to and fro between the loft-room and the house with such little stimulants and comforts as we thought it safe to give him. My guardian himself saw him before he was left for the night and reported to me when he returned to the growlery to write a letter on the boy’s behalf, which a messenger was charged to deliver at day-light in the morning, that he seemed easier and inclined to sleep. They had fastened his door on the outside, he said, in case of his being delirious, but had so arranged that he could not make any noise without being heard.

Ada being in our room with a cold, Mr. Skimpole was left alone all this time and entertained himself by playing snatches of pathetic airs and sometimes singing to them (as we heard at a distance) with great expression and feeling. When we rejoined him in the drawing-room he said he would give us a little ballad which had come into his head “apropos of our young friend,” and he sang one about a peasant boy,

> “Thrown on the side world, doomed to wander and roam,
> Bereft of his parents, bereft of a home.”

quite exquisitely. It was a song that always made him cry, he told us.

He was extremely gay all the rest of the evening, for he absolutely chirped—those were his delighted words—when he thought by what a happy talent for business he was surrounded. He gave us, in his glass of negus, “Better health to our young friend!” and supposed and gaily pursued the case of his being reserved like Whittington to become Lord Mayor of London. In that event, no doubt, he would establish the Jarndyce Institution and the Summerson Almshouses, and a little annual Corporation Pilgrimage to St. Albans. He had no doubt, he said, that our young friend was an excellent boy in his way, but his way was not the Harold Skimpole way; what Harold Skimpole was, Harold Skimpole had found himself, to his considerable surprise, when he first made his own acquaintance; he had accepted himself with all his failings and had thought it sound philosophy to make the best of the bargain; and he hoped we would do the same.

Charley’s last report was that the boy was quiet. I could see, from my

window, the lantern they had left him burning quietly; and I went to bed very happy to think that he was sheltered.

There was more movement and more talking than usual a little before daybreak, and it awoke me. As I was dressing, I looked out of my window and asked one of our men who had been among the active sympathizers last night whether there was anything wrong about the house. The lantern was still burning in the loft-window.

"It's the boy, miss," said he.

"Is he worse?" I inquired.

"Gone, miss.

"Dead!"

"Dead, miss? No. Gone clean off."

At what time of the night he had gone, or how, or why, it seemed hopeless ever to divine. The door remaining as it had been left, and the lantern standing in the window, it could only be supposed that he had got out by a trap in the floor which communicated with an empty cart-house below. But he had shut it down again, if that were so; and it looked as if it had not been raised. Nothing of any kind was missing. On this fact being clearly ascertained, we all yielded to the painful belief that delirium had come upon him in the night and that, allured by some imaginary object or pursued by some imaginary horror, he had strayed away in that worse than helpless state; all of us, that is to say, but Mr. Skimpole, who repeatedly suggested, in his usual easy light style, that it had occurred to our young friend that he was not a safe inmate, having a bad kind of fever upon him, and that he had with great natural politeness taken himself off.

Every possible inquiry was made, and every place was searched. The brick-kilns were examined, the cottages were visited, the two women were particularly questioned, but they knew nothing of him, and nobody could doubt that their wonder was genuine. The weather had for some time been too wet and the night itself had been too wet to admit of any tracing by footsteps. Hedge and ditch, and wall, and rick and stack, were examined by our men for a long distance round, lest the boy should be lying in such a place insensible or dead; but nothing was seen to indicate that he had ever been near. From the time when he was left in the loft-room, he vanished.

The search continued for five days. I do not mean that it ceased even then, but that my attention was then diverted into a current very memorable

to me.

As Charley was at her writing again in my room in the evening, and as I sat opposite to her at work, I felt the table tremble. Looking up, I saw my little maid shivering from head to foot.

"Charley," said I, "are you so cold?"

"I think I am, miss," she replied. "I don't know what it is. I can't hold myself still. I felt so yesterday at about this same time, miss. Don't be uneasy, I think I'm ill."

I heard Ada's voice outside, and I hurried to the door of communication between my room and our pretty sitting-room, and locked it. Just in time, for she tapped at it while my hand was yet upon the key.

Ada called to me to let her in, but I said, "Not now, my dearest. Go away. There's nothing the matter; I will come to you presently." Ah! It was a long, long time before my darling girl and I were companions again.

Charley fell ill. In twelve hours she was very ill. I moved her to my room, and laid her in my bed, and sat down quietly to nurse her. I told my guardian all about it, and why I felt it was necessary that I should seclude myself, and my reason for not seeing my darling above all. At first she came very often to the door, and called to me, and even reproached me with sobs and tears; but I wrote her a long letter saying that she made me anxious and unhappy and imploring her, as she loved me and wished my mind to be at peace, to come no nearer than the garden. After that she came beneath the window even oftener than she had come to the door, and if I had learnt to love her dear sweet voice before when we were hardly ever apart, how did I learn to love it then, when I stood behind the window-curtain listening and replying, but not so much as looking out! How did I learn to love it afterwards, when the harder time came!

They put a bed for me in our sitting-room; and by keeping the door wide open, I turned the two rooms into one, now that Ada had vacated that part of the house, and kept them always fresh and airy. There was not a servant in or about the house but was so good that they would all most gladly have come to me at any hour of the day or night without the least fear or unwillingness, but I thought it best to choose one worthy woman who was never to see Ada and whom I could trust to come and go with all precaution. Through her means I got out to take the air with my guardian when there was no fear of meeting Ada, and wanted for nothing in the way

of attendance, any more than in any other respect.

And thus poor Charley sickened and grew worse, and fell into heavy danger of death, and lay severely ill for many a long round of day and night. So patient she was, so uncomplaining, and inspired by such a gentle fortitude that very often as I sat by Charley holding her head in my arms—repose would come to her, so, when it would come to her in no other attitude—I silently prayed to our Father in heaven that I might not forget the lesson which this little sister taught me.

I was very sorrowful to think that Charley's pretty looks would change and be disfigured, even if she recovered—she was such a child with her dimpled face—but that thought was, for the greater part, lost in her greater peril. When she was at the worst, and her mind rambled again to the cares of her father's sick bed and the little children, she still knew me so far as that she would be quiet in my arms when she could lie quiet nowhere else, and murmur out the wanderings of her mind less restlessly. At those times I used to think, how should I ever tell the two remaining babies that the baby who had learned of her faithful heart to be a mother to them in their need was dead!

There were other times when Charley knew me well and talked to me, telling me that she sent her love to Tom and Emma and that she was sure Tom would grow up to be a good man. At those times Charley would speak to me of what she had read to her father as well as she could to comfort him, of that young man carried out to be buried who was the only son of his mother and she was a widow, of the ruler's daughter raised up by the gracious hand upon her bed of death. And Charley told me that when her father died she had kneeled down and prayed in her first sorrow that he likewise might be raised up and given back to his poor children, and that if she should never get better and should die too, she thought it likely that it might come into Tom's mind to offer the same prayer for her. Then would I show Tom how these people of old days had been brought back to life on earth, only that we might know our hope to be restored to heaven!

But of all the various times there were in Charley's illness, there was not one when she lost the gentle qualities I have spoken of. And there were many, many when I thought in the night of the last high belief in the watching angel, and the last higher trust in God, on the part of her poor despised father.

And Charley did not die. She flutteringly and slowly turned the dangerous point, after long lingering there, and then began to mend. The hope that never had been given, from the first, of Charley being in outward appearance Charley any more soon began to be encouraged; and even that prospered, and I saw her growing into her old childish likeness again.

It was a great morning when I could tell Ada all this as she stood out in the garden; and it was a great evening when Charley and I at last took tea together in the next room. But on that same evening, I felt that I was stricken cold.

Happily for both of us, it was not until Charley was safe in bed again and placidly asleep that I began to think the contagion of her illness was upon me. I had been able easily to hide what I felt at tea-time, but I was past that already now, and I knew that I was rapidly following in Charley's steps.

I was well enough, however, to be up early in the morning, and to return my darling's cheerful blessing from the garden, and to talk with her as long as usual. But I was not free from an impression that I had been walking about the two rooms in the night, a little beside myself, though knowing where I was; and I felt confused at times—with a curious sense of fullness, as if I were becoming too large altogether.

In the evening I was so much worse that I resolved to prepare Charley, with which view I said, "You're getting quite strong, Charley, are you not?'

"Oh, quite!" said Charley.

"Strong enough to be told a secret, I think, Charley?"

"Quite strong enough for that, miss!" cried Charley. But Charley's face fell in the height of her delight, for she saw the secret in MY face; and she came out of the great chair, and fell upon my bosom, and said "Oh, miss, it's my doing! It's my doing!" and a great deal more out of the fullness of her grateful heart.

"Now, Charley," said I after letting her go on for a little while, "if I am to be ill, my great trust, humanly speaking, is in you. And unless you are as quiet and composed for me as you always were for yourself, you can never fulfil it, Charley."

"If you'll let me cry a little longer, miss," said Charley. "Oh, my dear, my dear! If you'll only let me cry a little longer. Oh, my dear!"—how affectionately and devotedly she poured this out as she clung to my neck, I never can remember without tears—"I'll be good."

So I let Charley cry a little longer, and it did us both good.

"Trust in me now, if you please, miss," said Charley quietly. "I am listening to everything you say."

"It's very little at present, Charley. I shall tell your doctor to-night that I don't think I am well and that you are going to nurse me."

For that the poor child thanked me with her whole heart. "And in the morning, when you hear Miss Ada in the garden, if I should not be quite able to go to the window-curtain as usual, do you go, Charley, and say I am asleep—that I have rather tired myself, and am asleep. At all times keep the room as I have kept it, Charley, and let no one come."

Charley promised, and I lay down, for I was very heavy. I saw the doctor that night and asked the favour of him that I wished to ask relative to his saying nothing of my illness in the house as yet. I have a very indistinct remembrance of that night melting into day, and of day melting into night again; but I was just able on the first morning to get to the window and speak to my darling.

On the second morning I heard her dear voice—Oh, how dear now!—outside; and I asked Charley, with some difficulty (speech being painful to me), to go and say I was asleep. I heard her answer softly, "Don't disturb her, Charley, for the world!"

"How does my own Pride look, Charley?" I inquired.

"Disappointed, miss," said Charley, peeping through the curtain.

"But I know she is very beautiful this morning."

"She is indeed, miss," answered Charley, peeping. "Still looking up at the window."

With her blue clear eyes, God bless them, always loveliest when raised like that!

I called Charley to me and gave her her last charge.

"Now, Charley, when she knows I am ill, she will try to make her way into the room. Keep her out, Charley, if you love me truly, to the last! Charley, if you let her in but once, only to look upon me for one moment as I lie here, I shall die."

"I never will! I never will!" she promised me.

"I believe it, my dear Charley. And now come and sit beside me for a little while, and touch me with your hand. For I cannot see you, Charley; I am blind."

CHAPTER XXXII

The Appointed Time

IT IS NIGHT IN Lincoln’s Inn—perplexed and troublous valley of the shadow of the law, where suitors generally find but little day—and fat candles are snuffed out in offices, and clerks have rattled down the crazy wooden stairs and dispersed. The bell that rings at nine o’clock has ceased its doleful clangour about nothing; the gates are shut; and the night-porter, a solemn warder with a mighty power of sleep, keeps guard in his lodge. From tiers of staircase windows clogged lamps like the eyes of Equity, bleared Argus with a fathomless pocket for every eye and an eye upon it, dimly blink at the stars. In dirty upper casements, here and there, hazy little patches of candlelight reveal where some wise draughtsman and conveyancer yet toils for the entanglement of real estate in meshes of sheep-skin, in the average ratio of about a dozen of sheep to an acre of land. Over which bee-like industry these benefactors of their species linger yet, though office-hours be past, that they may give, for every day, some good account at last.

In the neighbouring court, where the Lord Chancellor of the rag and bottle shop dwells, there is a general tendency towards beer and supper. Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins, whose respective sons, engaged with a circle of acquaintance in the game of hide and seek, have been lying in ambush about the by-ways of Chancery Lane for some hours and scouring the plain of the same thoroughfare to the confusion of passengers—Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins have but now exchanged congratulations on the children being abed, and they still linger on a door-step over a few parting words. Mr. Krook and his lodger, and the fact of Mr. Krook’s being “continually in liquor,” and the testamentary prospects of the young man are, as usual, the staple of their conversation. But they have something to say, likewise, of the Harmonic Meeting at the Sol’s Arms, where the sound of the piano through the partly opened windows jingles out into the court, and where Little Swills, after keeping the lovers of harmony in a roar like a very Yorick, may now be heard taking the gruff line in a concerted piece and sentimentally

adjuring his friends and patrons to “Listen, listen, listen, tew the wa-ter fall!” Mrs. Perkins and Mrs. Piper compare opinions on the subject of the young lady of professional celebrity who assists at the Harmonic Meetings and who has a space to herself in the manuscript announcement in the window, Mrs. Perkins possessing information that she has been married a year and a half, though announced as Miss M. Melvilleson, the noted siren, and that her baby is clandestinely conveyed to the Sol’s Arms every night to receive its natural nourishment during the entertainments. “Sooner than which, myself,” says Mrs. Perkins, “I would get my living by selling lucifers.” Mrs. Piper, as in duty bound, is of the same opinion, holding that a private station is better than public applause, and thanking heaven for her own (and, by implication, Mrs. Perkins’) respectability. By this time the pot-boy of the Sol’s Arms appearing with her supper-pint well frothed, Mrs. Piper accepts that tankard and retires indoors, first giving a fair good night to Mrs. Perkins, who has had her own pint in her hand ever since it was fetched from the same hostelry by young Perkins before he was sent to bed. Now there is a sound of putting up shop-shutters in the court and a smell as of the smoking of pipes; and shooting stars are seen in upper windows, further indicating retirement to rest. Now, too, the policeman begins to push at doors; to try fastenings; to be suspicious of bundles; and to administer his beat, on the hypothesis that every one is either robbing or being robbed.

It is a close night, though the damp cold is searching too, and there is a laggard mist a little way up in the air. It is a fine steaming night to turn the slaughter-houses, the unwholesome trades, the sewerage, bad water, and burial-grounds to account, and give the registrar of deaths some extra business. It may be something in the air—there is plenty in it—or it may be something in himself that is in fault; but Mr. Weevle, otherwise Jobling, is very ill at ease. He comes and goes between his own room and the open street door twenty times an hour. He has been doing so ever since it fell dark. Since the Chancellor shut up his shop, which he did very early to-night, Mr. Weevle has been down and up, and down and up (with a cheap tight velvet skull-cap on his head, making his whiskers look out of all proportion), oftener than before.

It is no phenomenon that Mr. Snagsby should be ill at ease too, for he always is so, more or less, under the oppressive influence of the secret that is upon him. Impelled by the mystery of which he is a partaker and yet in

which he is not a sharer, Mr. Snagsby haunts what seems to be its fountain-head—the rag and bottle shop in the court. It has an irresistible attraction for him. Even now, coming round by the Sol's Arms with the intention of passing down the court, and out at the Chancery Lane end, and so terminating his unpremeditated after-supper stroll of ten minutes' long from his own door and back again, Mr. Snagsby approaches.

"What, Mr. Weevle?" says the stationer, stopping to speak. "Are YOU there?"

"Aye!" says Weevle, "Here I am, Mr. Snagsby."

"Airing yourself, as I am doing, before you go to bed?" the stationer inquires.

"Why, there's not much air to be got here; and what there is, is not very freshening," Weevle answers, glancing up and down the court.

"Very true, sir. Don't you observe," says Mr. Snagsby, pausing to sniff and taste the air a little, "don't you observe, Mr. Weevle, that you're—not to put too fine a point upon it—that you're rather greasy here, sir?"

"Why, I have noticed myself that there is a queer kind of flavour in the place to-night," Mr. Weevle rejoins. "I suppose it's chops at the Sol's Arms."

"Chops, do you think? Oh! Chops, eh?" Mr. Snagsby sniffs and tastes again. "Well, sir, I suppose it is. But I should say their cook at the Sol wanted a little looking after. She has been burning 'em, sir! And I don't think"—Mr. Snagsby sniffs and tastes again and then spits and wipes his mouth—"I don't think—not to put too fine a point upon it—that they were quite fresh when they were shown the gridiron."

"That's very likely. It's a tainting sort of weather."

"It IS a tainting sort of weather," says Mr. Snagsby, "and I find it sinking to the spirits."

"By George! I find it gives me the horrors," returns Mr. Weevle.

"Then, you see, you live in a lonesome way, and in a lonesome room, with a black circumstance hanging over it," says Mr. Snagsby, looking in past the other's shoulder along the dark passage and then falling back a step to look up at the house. "I couldn't live in that room alone, as you do, sir. I should get so fidgety and worried of an evening, sometimes, that I should be driven to come to the door and stand here sooner than sit there. But then it's very true that you didn't see, in your room, what I saw there. That

makes a difference."

"I know quite enough about it," returns Tony.

"It's not agreeable, is it?" pursues Mr. Snagsby, coughing his cough of mild persuasion behind his hand. "Mr. Krook ought to consider it in the rent. I hope he does, I am sure."

"I hope he does," says Tony. "But I doubt it."

"You find the rent too high, do you, sir?" returns the stationer. "Rents ARE high about here. I don't know how it is exactly, but the law seems to put things up in price. Not," adds Mr. Snagsby with his apologetic cough, "that I mean to say a word against the profession I get my living by."

Mr. Weevle again glances up and down the court and then looks at the stationer. Mr. Snagsby, blankly catching his eye, looks upward for a star or so and coughs a cough expressive of not exactly seeing his way out of this conversation.

"It's a curious fact, sir," he observes, slowly rubbing his hands, "that he should have been—"

"Who's he?" interrupts Mr. Weevle.

"The deceased, you know," says Mr. Snagsby, twitching his head and right eyebrow towards the staircase and tapping his acquaintance on the button.

"Ah, to be sure!" returns the other as if he were not over-fond of the subject. "I thought we had done with him."

"I was only going to say it's a curious fact, sir, that he should have come and lived here, and been one of my writers, and then that you should come and live here, and be one of my writers too. Which there is nothing derogatory, but far from it in the appellation," says Mr. Snagsby, breaking off with a mistrust that he may have unpolitely asserted a kind of proprietorship in Mr. Weevle, "because I have known writers that have gone into brewers' houses and done really very respectable indeed. Eminently respectable, sir," adds Mr. Snagsby with a misgiving that he has not improved the matter.

"It's a curious coincidence, as you say," answers Weevle, once more glancing up and down the court.

"Seems a fate in it, don't there?" suggests the stationer.

"There does."

"Just so," observes the stationer with his confirmatory cough. "Quite a

fate in it. Quite a fate. Well, Mr. Weevle, I am afraid I must bid you good night”—Mr. Snagsby speaks as if it made him desolate to go, though he has been casting about for any means of escape ever since he stopped to speak —“my little woman will be looking for me else. Good night, sir!”

If Mr. Snagsby hastens home to save his little woman the trouble of looking for him, he might set his mind at rest on that score. His little woman has had her eye upon him round the Sol’s Arms all this time and now glides after him with a pocket handkerchief wrapped over her head, honouring Mr. Weevle and his doorway with a searching glance as she goes past.

“You’ll know me again, ma’am, at all events,” says Mr. Weevle to himself; “and I can’t compliment you on your appearance, whoever you are, with your head tied up in a bundle. Is this fellow NEVER coming!”

This fellow approaches as he speaks. Mr. Weevle softly holds up his finger, and draws him into the passage, and closes the street door. Then they go upstairs, Mr. Weevle heavily, and Mr. Guppy (for it is he) very lightly indeed. When they are shut into the back room, they speak low.

“I thought you had gone to Jericho at least instead of coming here,” says Tony.

“Why, I said about ten.”

“You said about ten,” Tony repeats. “Yes, so you did say about ten. But according to my count, it’s ten times ten—it’s a hundred o’clock. I never had such a night in my life!”

“What has been the matter?”

“That’s it!” says Tony. “Nothing has been the matter. But here have I been stewing and fuming in this jolly old crib till I have had the horrors falling on me as thick as hail. THERE’S a blessed-looking candle!” says Tony, pointing to the heavily burning taper on his table with a great cabbage head and a long winding-sheet.

“That’s easily improved,” Mr. Guppy observes as he takes the snuffers in hand.

“IS it?” returns his friend. “Not so easily as you think. It has been smouldering like that ever since it was lighted.”

“Why, what’s the matter with you, Tony?” inquires Mr. Guppy, looking at him, snuffers in hand, as he sits down with his elbow on the table.

“William Guppy,” replies the other, “I am in the downs. It’s this

unbearably dull, suicidal room—and old Boguey downstairs, I suppose." Mr. Weevle moodily pushes the snuffers-tray from him with his elbow, leans his head on his hand, puts his feet on the fender, and looks at the fire. Mr. Guppy, observing him, slightly tosses his head and sits down on the other side of the table in an easy attitude.

"Wasn't that Snagsby talking to you, Tony?"

"Yes, and he—yes, it was Snagsby," said Mr. Weevle, altering the construction of his sentence.

"On business?"

"No. No business. He was only sauntering by and stopped to prose."

"I thought it was Snagsby," says Mr. Guppy, "and thought it as well that he shouldn't see me, so I waited till he was gone."

"There we go again, William G.!" cried Tony, looking up for an instant. "So mysterious and secret! By George, if we were going to commit a murder, we couldn't have more mystery about it!"

Mr. Guppy affects to smile, and with the view of changing the conversation, looks with an admiration, real or pretended, round the room at the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, terminating his survey with the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantelshelf, in which she is represented on a terrace, with a pedestal upon the terrace, and a vase upon the pedestal, and her shawl upon the vase, and a prodigious piece of fur upon the shawl, and her arm on the prodigious piece of fur, and a bracelet on her arm.

"That's very like Lady Dedlock," says Mr. Guppy. "It's a speaking likeness."

"I wish it was," growls Tony, without changing his position. "I should have some fashionable conversation, here, then."

Finding by this time that his friend is not to be wheedled into a more sociable humour, Mr. Guppy puts about upon the ill-used tack and remonstrates with him.

"Tony," says he, "I can make allowances for lowness of spirits, for no man knows what it is when it does come upon a man better than I do, and no man perhaps has a better right to know it than a man who has an unrequited image imprinted on his 'eart. But there are bounds to these things when an unoffending party is in question, and I will acknowledge to you, Tony, that I don't think your manner on the present occasion is hospitable or quite gentlemanly."

“This is strong language, William Guppy,” returns Mr. Weevle.

“Sir, it may be,” retorts Mr. William Guppy, “but I feel strongly when I use it.”

Mr. Weevle admits that he has been wrong and begs Mr. William Guppy to think no more about it. Mr. William Guppy, however, having got the advantage, cannot quite release it without a little more injured remonstrance.

“No! Dash it, Tony,” says that gentleman, “you really ought to be careful how you wound the feelings of a man who has an unrequited image imprinted on his ’eart and who is NOT altogether happy in those chords which vibrate to the tenderest emotions. You, Tony, possess in yourself all that is calculated to charm the eye and allure the taste. It is not—happily for you, perhaps, and I may wish that I could say the same—it is not your character to hover around one flower. The ole garden is open to you, and your airy pinions carry you through it. Still, Tony, far be it from me, I am sure, to wound even your feelings without a cause!”

Tony again entreats that the subject may be no longer pursued, saying emphatically, “William Guppy, drop it!” Mr. Guppy acquiesces, with the reply, “I never should have taken it up, Tony, of my own accord.”

“And now,” says Tony, stirring the fire, “touching this same bundle of letters. Isn’t it an extraordinary thing of Krook to have appointed twelve o’clock to-night to hand ’em over to me?”

“Very. What did he do it for?”

“What does he do anything for? HE don’t know. Said to-day was his birthday and he’d hand ’em over to-night at twelve o’clock. He’ll have drunk himself blind by that time. He has been at it all day.”

“He hasn’t forgotten the appointment, I hope?”

“Forgotten? Trust him for that. He never forgets anything. I saw him to-night, about eight—helped him to shut up his shop—and he had got the letters then in his hairy cap. He pulled it off and showed ’em me. When the shop was closed, he took them out of his cap, hung his cap on the chair-back, and stood turning them over before the fire. I heard him a little while afterwards, through the floor here, humming like the wind, the only song he knows—about Bibo, and old Charon, and Bibo being drunk when he died, or something or other. He has been as quiet since as an old rat asleep in his hole.”

“And you are to go down at twelve?”

“At twelve. And as I tell you, when you came it seemed to me a hundred.”

“Tony,” says Mr. Guppy after considering a little with his legs crossed, “he can’t read yet, can he?”

“Read! He’ll never read. He can make all the letters separately, and he knows most of them separately when he sees them; he has got on that much, under me; but he can’t put them together. He’s too old to acquire the knack of it now—and too drunk.”

“Tony,” says Mr. Guppy, uncrossing and recrossing his legs, “how do you suppose he spelt out that name of Hawdon?”

“He never spelt it out. You know what a curious power of eye he has and how he has been used to employ himself in copying things by eye alone. He imitated it, evidently from the direction of a letter, and asked me what it meant.”

“Tony,” says Mr. Guppy, uncrossing and recrossing his legs again, “should you say that the original was a man’s writing or a woman’s?”

“A woman’s. Fifty to one a lady’s—slopes a good deal, and the end of the letter ’n,’ long and hasty.”

Mr. Guppy has been biting his thumb-nail during this dialogue, generally changing the thumb when he has changed the cross leg. As he is going to do so again, he happens to look at his coat-sleeve. It takes his attention. He stares at it, aghast.

“Why, Tony, what on earth is going on in this house to-night? Is there a chimney on fire?”

“Chimney on fire!”

“Ah!” returns Mr. Guppy. “See how the soot’s falling. See here, on my arm! See again, on the table here! Confound the stuff, it won’t blow off—smears like black fat!”

They look at one another, and Tony goes listening to the door, and a little way upstairs, and a little way downstairs. Comes back and says it’s all right and all quiet, and quotes the remark he lately made to Mr. Snagsby about their cooking chops at the Sol’s Arms.

“And it was then,” resumes Mr. Guppy, still glancing with remarkable aversion at the coat-sleeve, as they pursue their conversation before the fire, leaning on opposite sides of the table, with their heads very near together,

“that he told you of his having taken the bundle of letters from his lodger’s portmanteau?”

“That was the time, sir,” answers Tony, faintly adjusting his whiskers. “Whereupon I wrote a line to my dear boy, the Honourable William Guppy, informing him of the appointment for to-night and advising him not to call before, Boguey being a slyboots.”

The light vivacious tone of fashionable life which is usually assumed by Mr. Weevle sits so ill upon him to-night that he abandons that and his whiskers together, and after looking over his shoulder, appears to yield himself up a prey to the horrors again.

“You are to bring the letters to your room to read and compare, and to get yourself into a position to tell him all about them. That’s the arrangement, isn’t it, Tony?” asks Mr. Guppy, anxiously biting his thumb-nail.

“You can’t speak too low. Yes. That’s what he and I agreed.”

“I tell you what, Tony—”

“You can’t speak too low,” says Tony once more. Mr. Guppy nods his sagacious head, advances it yet closer, and drops into a whisper.

“I tell you what. The first thing to be done is to make another packet like the real one so that if he should ask to see the real one while it’s in my possession, you can show him the dummy.”

“And suppose he detects the dummy as soon as he sees it, which with his biting screw of an eye is about five hundred times more likely than not,” suggests Tony.

“Then we’ll face it out. They don’t belong to him, and they never did. You found that, and you placed them in my hands—a legal friend of yours—for security. If he forces us to it, they’ll be producible, won’t they?”

“Ye-es,” is Mr. Weevle’s reluctant admission.

“Why, Tony,” remonstrates his friend, “how you look! You don’t doubt William Guppy? You don’t suspect any harm?”

“I don’t suspect anything more than I know, William,” returns the other gravely.

“And what do you know?” urges Mr. Guppy, raising his voice a little; but on his friend’s once more warning him, “I tell you, you can’t speak too low,” he repeats his question without any sound at all, forming with his lips only the words, “What do you know?”

“I know three things. First, I know that here we are whispering in secrecy, a pair of conspirators.”

“Well!” says Mr. Guppy. “And we had better be that than a pair of noodles, which we should be if we were doing anything else, for it’s the only way of doing what we want to do. Secondly?”

“Secondly, it’s not made out to me how it’s likely to be profitable, after all.”

Mr. Guppy casts up his eyes at the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantelshelf and replies, “Tony, you are asked to leave that to the honour of your friend. Besides its being calculated to serve that friend in those chords of the human mind which—which need not be called into agonizing vibration on the present occasion—your friend is no fool. What’s that?”

“It’s eleven o’clock striking by the bell of Saint Paul’s. Listen and you’ll hear all the bells in the city jangling.”

Both sit silent, listening to the metal voices, near and distant, resounding from towers of various heights, in tones more various than their situations. When these at length cease, all seems more mysterious and quiet than before. One disagreeable result of whispering is that it seems to evoke an atmosphere of silence, haunted by the ghosts of sound—strange cracks and tickings, the rustling of garments that have no substance in them, and the tread of dreadful feet that would leave no mark on the sea-sand or the winter snow. So sensitive the two friends happen to be that the air is full of these phantoms, and the two look over their shoulders by one consent to see that the door is shut.

“Yes, Tony?” says Mr. Guppy, drawing nearer to the fire and biting his unsteady thumb-nail. “You were going to say, thirdly?”

“It’s far from a pleasant thing to be plotting about a dead man in the room where he died, especially when you happen to live in it.”

“But we are plotting nothing against him, Tony.”

“May be not, still I don’t like it. Live here by yourself and see how YOU like it.”

“As to dead men, Tony,” proceeds Mr. Guppy, evading this proposal, “there have been dead men in most rooms.”

“I know there have, but in most rooms you let them alone, and—and they let you alone,” Tony answers.

The two look at each other again. Mr. Guppy makes a hurried remark to

the effect that they may be doing the deceased a service, that he hopes so. There is an oppressive blank until Mr. Weevle, by stirring the fire suddenly, makes Mr. Guppy start as if his heart had been stirred instead.

"Fah! Here's more of this hateful soot hanging about," says he. "Let us open the window a bit and get a mouthful of air. It's too close."

He raises the sash, and they both rest on the window-sill, half in and half out of the room. The neighbouring houses are too near to admit of their seeing any sky without craning their necks and looking up, but lights in frowsy windows here and there, and the rolling of distant carriages, and the new expression that there is of the stir of men, they find to be comfortable. Mr. Guppy, noiselessly tapping on the window-sill, resumes his whispering in quite a light-comedy tone.

"By the by, Tony, don't forget old Smallweed," meaning the younger of that name. "I have not let him into this, you know. That grandfather of his is too keen by half. It runs in the family."

"I remember," says Tony. "I am up to all that."

"And as to Krook," resumes Mr. Guppy. "Now, do you suppose he really has got hold of any other papers of importance, as he has boasted to you, since you have been such allies?"

Tony shakes his head. "I don't know. Can't Imagine. If we get through this business without rousing his suspicions, I shall be better informed, no doubt. How can I know without seeing them, when he don't know himself? He is always spelling out words from them, and chalking them over the table and the shop-wall, and asking what this is and what that is; but his whole stock from beginning to end may easily be the waste-paper he bought it as, for anything I can say. It's a monomania with him to think he is possessed of documents. He has been going to learn to read them this last quarter of a century, I should judge, from what he tells me."

"How did he first come by that idea, though? That's the question," Mr. Guppy suggests with one eye shut, after a little forensic meditation. "He may have found papers in something he bought, where papers were not supposed to be, and may have got it into his shrewd head from the manner and place of their concealment that they are worth something."

"Or he may have been taken in, in some pretended bargain. Or he may have been muddled altogether by long staring at whatever he HAS got, and by drink, and by hanging about the Lord Chancellor's Court and hearing of

documents for ever," returns Mr. Weevle.

Mr. Guppy sitting on the window-sill, nodding his head and balancing all these possibilities in his mind, continues thoughtfully to tap it, and clasp it, and measure it with his hand, until he hastily draws his hand away.

"What, in the devil's name," he says, "is this! Look at my fingers!"

A thick, yellow liquor defiles them, which is offensive to the touch and sight and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil with some natural repulsion in it that makes them both shudder.

"What have you been doing here? What have you been pouring out of window?"

"I pouring out of window! Nothing, I swear! Never, since I have been here!" cries the lodger.

And yet look here—and look here! When he brings the candle here, from the corner of the window-sill, it slowly drips and creeps away down the bricks, here lies in a little thick nauseous pool.

"This is a horrible house," says Mr. Guppy, shutting down the window. "Give me some water or I shall cut my hand off."

He so washes, and rubs, and scrubs, and smells, and washes, that he has not long restored himself with a glass of brandy and stood silently before the fire when Saint Paul's bell strikes twelve and all those other bells strike twelve from their towers of various heights in the dark air, and in their many tones. When all is quiet again, the lodger says, "It's the appointed time at last. Shall I go?"

Mr. Guppy nods and gives him a "lucky touch" on the back, but not with the washed hand, though it is his right hand.

He goes downstairs, and Mr. Guppy tries to compose himself before the fire for waiting a long time. But in no more than a minute or two the stairs creak and Tony comes swiftly back.

"Have you got them?"

"Got them! No. The old man's not there."

He has been so horribly frightened in the short interval that his terror seizes the other, who makes a rush at him and asks loudly, "What's the matter?"

"I couldn't make him hear, and I softly opened the door and looked in. And the burning smell is there—and the soot is there, and the oil is there—and he is not there!" Tony ends this with a groan.

Mr. Guppy takes the light. They go down, more dead than alive, and holding one another, push open the door of the back shop. The cat has retreated close to it and stands snarling, not at them, at something on the ground before the fire. There is a very little fire left in the grate, but there is a smouldering, suffocating vapour in the room and a dark, greasy coating on the walls and ceiling. The chairs and table, and the bottle so rarely absent from the table, all stand as usual. On one chair-back hang the old man's hairy cap and coat.

"Look!" whispers the lodger, pointing his friend's attention to these objects with a trembling finger. "I told you so. When I saw him last, he took his cap off, took out the little bundle of old letters, hung his cap on the back of the chair—his coat was there already, for he had pulled that off before he went to put the shutters up—and I left him turning the letters over in his hand, standing just where that crumbled black thing is upon the floor."

Is he hanging somewhere? They look up. No.

"See!" whispers Tony. "At the foot of the same chair there lies a dirty bit of thin red cord that they tie up pens with. That went round the letters. He undid it slowly, leering and laughing at me, before he began to turn them over, and threw it there. I saw it fall."

"What's the matter with the cat?" says Mr. Guppy. "Look at her!"

"Mad, I think. And no wonder in this evil place."

They advance slowly, looking at all these things. The cat remains where they found her, still snarling at the something on the ground before the fire and between the two chairs. What is it? Hold up the light.

Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is—is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? Oh, horror, he IS here! And this from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another into the street, is all that represents him.

Help, help, help! Come into this house for heaven's sake! Plenty will come in, but none can help. The Lord Chancellor of that court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all lord chancellors in all courts and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been

prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally—inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only—spontaneous combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Interlopers

NOW DO THOSE TWO gentlemen not very neat about the cuffs and buttons who attended the last coroner's inquest at the Sol's Arms reappear in the precincts with surprising swiftness (being, in fact, breathlessly fetched by the active and intelligent beadle), and institute perquisitions through the court, and dive into the Sol's parlour, and write with ravenous little pens on tissue-paper. Now do they note down, in the watches of the night, how the neighbourhood of Chancery Lane was yesterday, at about midnight, thrown into a state of the most intense agitation and excitement by the following alarming and horrible discovery. Now do they set forth how it will doubtless be remembered that some time back a painful sensation was created in the public mind by a case of mysterious death from opium occurring in the first floor of the house occupied as a rag, bottle, and general marine store shop, by an eccentric individual of intemperate habits, far advanced in life, named Krook; and how, by a remarkable coincidence, Krook was examined at the inquest, which it may be recollected was held on that occasion at the Sol's Arms, a well-conducted tavern immediately adjoining the premises in question on the west side and licensed to a highly respectable landlord, Mr. James George Bogsby. Now do they show (in as many words as possible) how during some hours of yesterday evening a very peculiar smell was observed by the inhabitants of the court, in which the tragical occurrence which forms the subject of that present account transpired; and which odour was at one time so powerful that Mr. Swills, a comic vocalist professionally engaged by Mr. J. G. Bogsby, has himself stated to our reporter that he mentioned to Miss M. Melvilleson, a lady of some pretensions to musical ability, likewise engaged by Mr. J. G. Bogsby to sing at a series of concerts called Harmonic Assemblies, or Meetings, which it would appear are held at the Sol's Arms under Mr. Bogsby's direction pursuant to the Act of George the Second, that he (Mr. Swills) found his voice seriously affected by the impure state of the atmosphere, his

jocose expression at the time being that he was like an empty post-office, for he hadn't a single note in him. How this account of Mr. Swills is entirely corroborated by two intelligent married females residing in the same court and known respectively by the names of Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins, both of whom observed the foetid effluvia and regarded them as being emitted from the premises in the occupation of Krook, the unfortunate deceased. All this and a great deal more the two gentlemen who have formed an amicable partnership in the melancholy catastrophe write down on the spot; and the boy population of the court (out of bed in a moment) swarm up the shutters of the Sol's Arms parlour, to behold the tops of their heads while they are about it.

The whole court, adult as well as boy, is sleepless for that night, and can do nothing but wrap up its many heads, and talk of the ill-fated house, and look at it. Miss Flite has been bravely rescued from her chamber, as if it were in flames, and accommodated with a bed at the Sol's Arms. The Sol neither turns off its gas nor shuts its door all night, for any kind of public excitement makes good for the Sol and causes the court to stand in need of comfort. The house has not done so much in the stomachic article of cloves or in brandy-and-water warm since the inquest. The moment the pot-boy heard what had happened, he rolled up his shirt-sleeves tight to his shoulders and said, "There'll be a run upon us!" In the first outcry, young Piper dashed off for the fire-engines and returned in triumph at a jolting gallop perched up aloft on the Phoenix and holding on to that fabulous creature with all his might in the midst of helmets and torches. One helmet remains behind after careful investigation of all chinks and crannies and slowly paces up and down before the house in company with one of the two policemen who have likewise been left in charge thereof. To this trio everybody in the court possessed of sixpence has an insatiate desire to exhibit hospitality in a liquid form.

Mr. Weevle and his friend Mr. Guppy are within the bar at the Sol and are worth anything to the Sol that the bar contains if they will only stay there. "This is not a time," says Mr. Bogsby, "to haggle about money," though he looks something sharply after it, over the counter; "give your orders, you two gentlemen, and you're welcome to whatever you put a name to."

Thus entreated, the two gentlemen (Mr. Weevle especially) put names to

so many things that in course of time they find it difficult to put a name to anything quite distinctly, though they still relate to all new-comers some version of the night they have had of it, and of what they said, and what they thought, and what they saw. Meanwhile, one or other of the policemen often flits about the door, and pushing it open a little way at the full length of his arm, looks in from outer gloom. Not that he has any suspicions, but that he may as well know what they are up to in there.

Thus night pursues its leaden course, finding the court still out of bed through the unwonted hours, still treating and being treated, still conducting itself similarly to a court that has had a little money left it unexpectedly. Thus night at length with slow-retreating steps departs, and the lamp-lighter going his rounds, like an executioner to a despotic king, strikes off the little heads of fire that have aspired to lessen the darkness. Thus the day cometh, whether or no.

And the day may discern, even with its dim London eye, that the court has been up all night. Over and above the faces that have fallen drowsily on tables and the heels that lie prone on hard floors instead of beds, the brick and mortar physiognomy of the very court itself looks worn and jaded. And now the neighbourhood, waking up and beginning to hear of what has happened, comes streaming in, half dressed, to ask questions; and the two policemen and the helmet (who are far less impressible externally than the court) have enough to do to keep the door.

“Good gracious, gentlemen!” says Mr. Snagsby, coming up. “What’s this I hear!”

“Why, it’s true,” returns one of the policemen. “That’s what it is. Now move on here, come!”

“Why, good gracious, gentlemen,” says Mr. Snagsby, somewhat promptly backed away, “I was at this door last night betwixt ten and eleven o’clock in conversation with the young man who lodges here.”

“Indeed?” returns the policeman. “You will find the young man next door then. Now move on here, some of you.”

“Not hurt, I hope?” says Mr. Snagsby.

“Hurt? No. What’s to hurt him!”

Mr. Snagsby, wholly unable to answer this or any question in his troubled mind, repairs to the Sol’s Arms and finds Mr. Weevle languishing over tea and toast with a considerable expression on him of exhausted

excitement and exhausted tobacco-smoke.

“And Mr. Guppy likewise!” quoth Mr. Snagsby. “Dear, dear, dear! What a fate there seems in all this! And my lit—”

Mr. Snagsby’s power of speech deserts him in the formation of the words “my little woman.” For to see that injured female walk into the Sol’s Arms at that hour of the morning and stand before the beer-engine, with her eyes fixed upon him like an accusing spirit, strikes him dumb.

“My dear,” says Mr. Snagsby when his tongue is loosened, “will you take anything? A little—not to put too fine a point upon it—drop of shrub?”

“No,” says Mrs. Snagsby.

“My love, you know these two gentlemen?”

“Yes!” says Mrs. Snagsby, and in a rigid manner acknowledges their presence, still fixing Mr. Snagsby with her eye.

The devoted Mr. Snagsby cannot bear this treatment. He takes Mrs. Snagsby by the hand and leads her aside to an adjacent cask.

“My little woman, why do you look at me in that way? Pray don’t do it.”

“I can’t help my looks,” says Mrs. Snagsby, “and if I could I wouldn’t.”

Mr. Snagsby, with his cough of meekness, rejoins, “Wouldn’t you really, my dear?” and meditates. Then coughs his cough of trouble and says, “This is a dreadful mystery, my love!” still fearfully disconcerted by Mrs. Snagsby’s eye.

“It IS,” returns Mrs. Snagsby, shaking her head, “a dreadful mystery.”

“My little woman,” urges Mr. Snagsby in a piteous manner, “don’t for goodness’ sake speak to me with that bitter expression and look at me in that searching way! I beg and entreat of you not to do it. Good Lord, you don’t suppose that I would go spontaneously combusting any person, my dear?”

“I can’t say,” returns Mrs. Snagsby.

On a hasty review of his unfortunate position, Mr. Snagsby “can’t say” either. He is not prepared positively to deny that he may have had something to do with it. He has had something—he don’t know what—to do with so much in this connexion that is mysterious that it is possible he may even be implicated, without knowing it, in the present transaction. He faintly wipes his forehead with his handkerchief and gasps.

“My life,” says the unhappy stationer, “would you have any objections to mention why, being in general so delicately circumspect in your conduct,

you come into a wine-vaults before breakfast?”

“Why do YOU come here?” inquires Mrs. Snagsby.

“My dear, merely to know the rights of the fatal accident which has happened to the venerable party who has been—combusted.” Mr. Snagsby has made a pause to suppress a groan. “I should then have related them to you, my love, over your French roll.”

“I dare say you would! You relate everything to me, Mr. Snagsby.”

“Every—my lit—”

“I should be glad,” says Mrs. Snagsby after contemplating his increased confusion with a severe and sinister smile, “if you would come home with me; I think you may be safer there, Mr. Snagsby, than anywhere else.”

“My love, I don’t know but what I may be, I am sure. I am ready to go.”

Mr. Snagsby casts his eye forlornly round the bar, gives Messrs. Weevle and Guppy good morning, assures them of the satisfaction with which he sees them uninjured, and accompanies Mrs. Snagsby from the Sol’s Arms. Before night his doubt whether he may not be responsible for some inconceivable part in the catastrophe which is the talk of the whole neighbourhood is almost resolved into certainty by Mrs. Snagsby’s pertinacity in that fixed gaze. His mental sufferings are so great that he entertains wandering ideas of delivering himself up to justice and requiring to be cleared if innocent and punished with the utmost rigour of the law if guilty.

Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy, having taken their breakfast, step into Lincoln’s Inn to take a little walk about the square and clear as many of the dark cobwebs out of their brains as a little walk may.

“There can be no more favourable time than the present, Tony,” says Mr. Guppy after they have broodingly made out the four sides of the square, “for a word or two between us upon a point on which we must, with very little delay, come to an understanding.”

“Now, I tell you what, William G.!” returns the other, eyeing his companion with a bloodshot eye. “If it’s a point of conspiracy, you needn’t take the trouble to mention it. I have had enough of that, and I ain’t going to have any more. We shall have YOU taking fire next or blowing up with a bang.”

This supposititious phenomenon is so very disagreeable to Mr. Guppy that his voice quakes as he says in a moral way, “Tony, I should have

thought that what we went through last night would have been a lesson to you never to be personal any more as long as you lived." To which Mr. Weevle returns, "William, I should have thought it would have been a lesson to YOU never to conspire any more as long as you lived." To which Mr. Guppy says, "Who's conspiring?" To which Mr. Jobling replies, "Why, YOU are!" To which Mr. Guppy retorts, "No, I am not." To which Mr. Jobling retorts again, "Yes, you are!" To which Mr. Guppy retorts, "Who says so?" To which Mr. Jobling retorts, "I say so!" To which Mr. Guppy retorts, "Oh, indeed?" To which Mr. Jobling retorts, "Yes, indeed!" And both being now in a heated state, they walk on silently for a while to cool down again.

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy then, "if you heard your friend out instead of flying at him, you wouldn't fall into mistakes. But your temper is hasty and you are not considerate. Possessing in yourself, Tony, all that is calculated to charm the eye—"

"Oh! Blow the eye!" cries Mr. Weevle, cutting him short. "Say what you have got to say!"

Finding his friend in this morose and material condition, Mr. Guppy only expresses the finer feelings of his soul through the tone of injury in which he recommences, "Tony, when I say there is a point on which we must come to an understanding pretty soon, I say so quite apart from any kind of conspiring, however innocent. You know it is professionally arranged beforehand in all cases that are tried what facts the witnesses are to prove. Is it or is it not desirable that we should know what facts we are to prove on the inquiry into the death of this unfortunate old mo—gentleman?" (Mr. Guppy was going to say "mogul," but thinks "gentleman" better suited to the circumstances.)

"What facts? THE facts."

"The facts bearing on that inquiry. Those are"—Mr. Guppy tells them off on his fingers—"what we knew of his habits, when you saw him last, what his condition was then, the discovery that we made, and how we made it."

"Yes," says Mr. Weevle. "Those are about the facts."

"We made the discovery in consequence of his having, in his eccentric way, an appointment with you at twelve o'clock at night, when you were to explain some writing to him as you had often done before on account of his not being able to read. I, spending the evening with you, was called down—

and so forth. The inquiry being only into the circumstances touching the death of the deceased, it's not necessary to go beyond these facts, I suppose you'll agree?"

"No!" returns Mr. Weevle. "I suppose not."

"And this is not a conspiracy, perhaps?" says the injured Guppy.

"No," returns his friend; "if it's nothing worse than this, I withdraw the observation."

"Now, Tony," says Mr. Guppy, taking his arm again and walking him slowly on, "I should like to know, in a friendly way, whether you have yet thought over the many advantages of your continuing to live at that place?"

"What do you mean?" says Tony, stopping.

"Whether you have yet thought over the many advantages of your continuing to live at that place?" repeats Mr. Guppy, walking him on again.

"At what place? THAT place?" pointing in the direction of the rag and bottle shop.

Mr. Guppy nods.

"Why, I wouldn't pass another night there for any consideration that you could offer me," says Mr. Weevle, haggardly staring.

"Do you mean it though, Tony?"

"Mean it! Do I look as if I mean it? I feel as if I do; I know that," says Mr. Weevle with a very genuine shudder.

"Then the possibility or probability—for such it must be considered—of your never being disturbed in possession of those effects lately belonging to a lone old man who seemed to have no relation in the world, and the certainty of your being able to find out what he really had got stored up there, don't weigh with you at all against last night, Tony, if I understand you?" says Mr. Guppy, biting his thumb with the appetite of vexation.

"Certainly not. Talk in that cool way of a fellow's living there?" cries Mr. Weevle indignantly. "Go and live there yourself."

"Oh! I, Tony!" says Mr. Guppy, soothing him. "I have never lived there and couldn't get a lodging there now, whereas you have got one."

"You are welcome to it," rejoins his friend, "and—ugh!—you may make yourself at home in it."

"Then you really and truly at this point," says Mr. Guppy, "give up the whole thing, if I understand you, Tony?"

"You never," returns Tony with a most convincing steadfastness, "said a

truer word in all your life. I do!”

While they are so conversing, a hackney-coach drives into the square, on the box of which vehicle a very tall hat makes itself manifest to the public. Inside the coach, and consequently not so manifest to the multitude, though sufficiently so to the two friends, for the coach stops almost at their feet, are the venerable Mr. Smallweed and Mrs. Smallweed, accompanied by their granddaughter Judy.

An air of haste and excitement pervades the party, and as the tall hat (surmounting Mr. Smallweed the younger) alights, Mr. Smallweed the elder pokes his head out of window and bawls to Mr. Guppy, “How de do, sir! How de do!”

“What do Chick and his family want here at this time of the morning, I wonder!” says Mr. Guppy, nodding to his familiar.

“My dear sir,” cries Grandfather Smallweed, “would you do me a favour? Would you and your friend be so very obleeging as to carry me into the public-house in the court, while Bart and his sister bring their grandmother along? Would you do an old man that good turn, sir?”

Mr. Guppy looks at his friend, repeating inquiringly, “The public-house in the court?” And they prepare to bear the venerable burden to the Sol’s Arms.

“There’s your fare!” says the patriarch to the coachman with a fierce grin and shaking his incapable fist at him. “Ask me for a penny more, and I’ll have my lawful revenge upon you. My dear young men, be easy with me, if you please. Allow me to catch you round the neck. I won’t squeeze you tighter than I can help. Oh, Lord! Oh, dear me! Oh, my bones!”

It is well that the Sol is not far off, for Mr. Weevle presents an apoplectic appearance before half the distance is accomplished. With no worse aggravation of his symptoms, however, than the utterance of divers croaking sounds expressive of obstructed respiration, he fulfils his share of the porterage and the benevolent old gentleman is deposited by his own desire in the parlour of the Sol’s Arms.

“Oh, Lord!” gasps Mr. Smallweed, looking about him, breathless, from an arm-chair. “Oh, dear me! Oh, my bones and back! Oh, my aches and pains! Sit down, you dancing, prancing, shambling, scrambling poll-parrot! Sit down!”

This little apostrophe to Mrs. Smallweed is occasioned by a propensity

on the part of that unlucky old lady whenever she finds herself on her feet to amble about and "set" to inanimate objects, accompanying herself with a chattering noise, as in a witch dance. A nervous affection has probably as much to do with these demonstrations as any imbecile intention in the poor old woman, but on the present occasion they are so particularly lively in connexion with the Windsor arm-chair, fellow to that in which Mr. Smallweed is seated, that she only quite desists when her grandchildren have held her down in it, her lord in the meanwhile bestowing upon her, with great volubility, the endearing epithet of "a pig-headed jackdaw," repeated a surprising number of times.

"My dear sir," Grandfather Smallweed then proceeds, addressing Mr. Guppy, "there has been a calamity here. Have you heard of it, either of you?"

"Heard of it, sir! Why, we discovered it."

"You discovered it. You two discovered it! Bart, THEY discovered it!"

The two discoverers stare at the Smallweeds, who return the compliment.

"My dear friends," whines Grandfather Smallweed, putting out both his hands, "I owe you a thousand thanks for discharging the melancholy office of discovering the ashes of Mrs. Smallweed's brother."

"Eh?" says Mr. Guppy.

"Mrs. Smallweed's brother, my dear friend—her only relation. We were not on terms, which is to be deplored now, but he never WOULD be on terms. He was not fond of us. He was eccentric—he was very eccentric. Unless he has left a will (which is not at all likely) I shall take out letters of administration. I have come down to look after the property; it must be sealed up, it must be protected. I have come down," repeats Grandfather Smallweed, hooking the air towards him with all his ten fingers at once, "to look after the property."

"I think, Small," says the disconsolate Mr. Guppy, "you might have mentioned that the old man was your uncle."

"You two were so close about him that I thought you would like me to be the same," returns that old bird with a secretly glistening eye. "Besides, I wasn't proud of him."

"Besides which, it was nothing to you, you know, whether he was or not," says Judy. Also with a secretly glistening eye.

“He never saw me in his life to know me,” observed Small; “I don’t know why I should introduce HIM, I am sure!”

“No, he never communicated with us, which is to be deplored,” the old gentleman strikes in, “but I have come to look after the property—to look over the papers, and to look after the property. We shall make good our title. It is in the hands of my solicitor. Mr. Tulkinghorn, of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, over the way there, is so good as to act as my solicitor; and grass don’t grow under HIS feet, I can tell ye. Krook was Mrs. Smallweed’s only brother; she had no relation but Krook, and Krook had no relation but Mrs. Smallweed. I am speaking of your brother, you brimstone black-beetle, that was seventy-six years of age.”

Mrs. Smallweed instantly begins to shake her head and pipe up, “Seventy-six pound seven and sevenpence! Seventy-six thousand bags of money! Seventy-six hundred thousand million of parcels of bank-notes!”

“Will somebody give me a quart pot?” exclaims her exasperated husband, looking helplessly about him and finding no missile within his reach. “Will somebody obleege me with a spittoon? Will somebody hand me anything hard and bruising to pelt at her? You hag, you cat, you dog, you brimstone barker!” Here Mr. Smallweed, wrought up to the highest pitch by his own eloquence, actually throws Judy at her grandmother in default of anything else, by butting that young virgin at the old lady with such force as he can muster and then dropping into his chair in a heap.

“Shake me up, somebody, if you’ll be so good,” says the voice from within the faintly struggling bundle into which he has collapsed. “I have come to look after the property. Shake me up, and call in the police on duty at the next house to be explained to about the property. My solicitor will be here presently to protect the property. Transportation or the gallows for anybody who shall touch the property!” As his dutiful grandchildren set him up, panting, and putting him through the usual restorative process of shaking and punching, he still repeats like an echo, “The—the property! The property! Property!”

Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy look at each other, the former as having relinquished the whole affair, the latter with a discomfited countenance as having entertained some lingering expectations yet. But there is nothing to be done in opposition to the Smallweed interest. Mr. Tulkinghorn’s clerk comes down from his official pew in the chambers to mention to the police

that Mr. Tulkinghorn is answerable for its being all correct about the next of kin and that the papers and effects will be formally taken possession of in due time and course. Mr. Smallweed is at once permitted so far to assert his supremacy as to be carried on a visit of sentiment into the next house and upstairs into Miss Flite's deserted room, where he looks like a hideous bird of prey newly added to her aviary.

The arrival of this unexpected heir soon taking wind in the court still makes good for the Sol and keeps the court upon its mettle. Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins think it hard upon the young man if there really is no will, and consider that a handsome present ought to be made him out of the estate. Young Piper and young Perkins, as members of that restless juvenile circle which is the terror of the foot-passengers in Chancery Lane, crumble into ashes behind the pump and under the archway all day long, where wild yells and hootings take place over their remains. Little Swills and Miss M. Melvilleson enter into affable conversation with their patrons, feeling that these unusual occurrences level the barriers between professionals and non-professionals. Mr. Bogsby puts up "The popular song of King Death, with chorus by the whole strength of the company," as the great Harmonic feature of the week and announces in the bill that "J. G. B. is induced to do so at a considerable extra expense in consequence of a wish which has been very generally expressed at the bar by a large body of respectable individuals and in homage to a late melancholy event which has aroused so much sensation." There is one point connected with the deceased upon which the court is particularly anxious, namely, that the fiction of a full-sized coffin should be preserved, though there is so little to put in it. Upon the undertaker's stating in the Sol's bar in the course of the day that he has received orders to construct "a six-footer," the general solicitude is much relieved, and it is considered that Mr. Smallweed's conduct does him great honour.

Out of the court, and a long way out of it, there is considerable excitement too, for men of science and philosophy come to look, and carriages set down doctors at the corner who arrive with the same intent, and there is more learned talk about inflammable gases and phosphuretted hydrogen than the court has ever imagined. Some of these authorities (of course the wisest) hold with indignation that the deceased had no business to die in the alleged manner; and being reminded by other authorities of a

certain inquiry into the evidence for such deaths reprinted in the sixth volume of the Philosophical Transactions; and also of a book not quite unknown on English medical jurisprudence; and likewise of the Italian case of the Countess Cornelia Baudi as set forth in detail by one Bianchini, prebendary of Verona, who wrote a scholarly work or so and was occasionally heard of in his time as having gleams of reason in him; and also of the testimony of Messrs. Fodere and Mere, two pestilent Frenchmen who WOULD investigate the subject; and further, of the corroborative testimony of Monsieur Le Cat, a rather celebrated French surgeon once upon a time, who had the unpoliteness to live in a house where such a case occurred and even to write an account of it—still they regard the late Mr. Krook's obstinacy in going out of the world by any such by-way as wholly unjustifiable and personally offensive. The less the court understands of all this, the more the court likes it, and the greater enjoyment it has in the stock in trade of the Sol's Arms. Then there comes the artist of a picture newspaper, with a foreground and figures ready drawn for anything from a wreck on the Cornish coast to a review in Hyde Park or a meeting in Manchester, and in Mrs. Perkins' own room, memorable evermore, he then and there throws in upon the block Mr. Krook's house, as large as life; in fact, considerably larger, making a very temple of it. Similarly, being permitted to look in at the door of the fatal chamber, he depicts that apartment as three-quarters of a mile long by fifty yards high, at which the court is particularly charmed. All this time the two gentlemen before mentioned pop in and out of every house and assist at the philosophical disputations—go everywhere and listen to everybody—and yet are always diving into the Sol's parlour and writing with the ravenous little pens on the tissue-paper.

At last come the coroner and his inquiry, like as before, except that the coroner cherishes this case as being out of the common way and tells the gentlemen of the jury, in his private capacity, that "that would seem to be an unlucky house next door, gentlemen, a destined house; but so we sometimes find it, and these are mysteries we can't account for!" After which the six-footer comes into action and is much admired.

In all these proceedings Mr. Guppy has so slight a part, except when he gives his evidence, that he is moved on like a private individual and can only haunt the secret house on the outside, where he has the mortification of

seeing Mr. Smallweed padlocking the door, and of bitterly knowing himself to be shut out. But before these proceedings draw to a close, that is to say, on the night next after the catastrophe, Mr. Guppy has a thing to say that must be said to Lady Dedlock.

For which reason, with a sinking heart and with that hang-dog sense of guilt upon him which dread and watching enfolded in the Sol's Arms have produced, the young man of the name of Guppy presents himself at the town mansion at about seven o'clock in the evening and requests to see her ladyship. Mercury replies that she is going out to dinner; don't he see the carriage at the door? Yes, he does see the carriage at the door; but he wants to see my Lady too.

Mercury is disposed, as he will presently declare to a fellow-gentleman in waiting, "to pitch into the young man"; but his instructions are positive. Therefore he sulkily supposes that the young man must come up into the library. There he leaves the young man in a large room, not over-light, while he makes report of him.

Mr. Guppy looks into the shade in all directions, discovering everywhere a certain charred and whitened little heap of coal or wood. Presently he hears a rustling. Is it—? No, it's no ghost, but fair flesh and blood, most brilliantly dressed.

"I have to beg your ladyship's pardon," Mr. Guppy stammers, very downcast. "This is an inconvenient time—"

"I told you, you could come at any time." She takes a chair, looking straight at him as on the last occasion.

"Thank your ladyship. Your ladyship is very affable."

"You can sit down." There is not much affability in her tone.

"I don't know, your ladyship, that it's worth while my sitting down and detaining you, for I—I have not got the letters that I mentioned when I had the honour of waiting on your ladyship."

"Have you come merely to say so?"

"Merely to say so, your ladyship." Mr. Guppy besides being depressed, disappointed, and uneasy, is put at a further disadvantage by the splendour and beauty of her appearance.

She knows its influence perfectly, has studied it too well to miss a grain of its effect on any one. As she looks at him so steadily and coldly, he not only feels conscious that he has no guide in the least perception of what is

really the complexion of her thoughts, but also that he is being every moment, as it were, removed further and further from her.

She will not speak, it is plain. So he must.

“In short, your ladyship,” says Mr. Guppy like a meanly penitent thief, “the person I was to have had the letters of, has come to a sudden end, and —” He stops. Lady Dedlock calmly finishes the sentence.

“And the letters are destroyed with the person?”

Mr. Guppy would say no if he could—as he is unable to hide.

“I believe so, your ladyship.”

If he could see the least sparkle of relief in her face now? No, he could see no such thing, even if that brave outside did not utterly put him away, and he were not looking beyond it and about it.

He falters an awkward excuse or two for his failure.

“Is this all you have to say?” inquires Lady Dedlock, having heard him out—or as nearly out as he can stumble.

Mr. Guppy thinks that’s all.

“You had better be sure that you wish to say nothing more to me, this being the last time you will have the opportunity.”

Mr. Guppy is quite sure. And indeed he has no such wish at present, by any means.

“That is enough. I will dispense with excuses. Good evening to you!” And she rings for Mercury to show the young man of the name of Guppy out.

But in that house, in that same moment, there happens to be an old man of the name of Tulkinghorn. And that old man, coming with his quiet footstep to the library, has his hand at that moment on the handle of the door—comes in—and comes face to face with the young man as he is leaving the room.

One glance between the old man and the lady, and for an instant the blind that is always down flies up. Suspicion, eager and sharp, looks out. Another instant, close again.

“I beg your pardon, Lady Dedlock. I beg your pardon a thousand times. It is so very unusual to find you here at this hour. I supposed the room was empty. I beg your pardon!”

“Stay!” She negligently calls him back. “Remain here, I beg. I am going out to dinner. I have nothing more to say to this young man!”

The disconcerted young man bows, as he goes out, and cringingly hopes that Mr. Tulkinghorn of the Fields is well.

“Aye, aye?” says the lawyer, looking at him from under his bent brows, though he has no need to look again—not he. “From Kenge and Carboy’s, surely?”

“Kenge and Carboy’s, Mr. Tulkinghorn. Name of Guppy, sir.”

“To be sure. Why, thank you, Mr. Guppy, I am very well!”

“Happy to hear it, sir. You can’t be too well, sir, for the credit of the profession.”

“Thank you, Mr. Guppy!”

Mr. Guppy sneaks away. Mr. Tulkinghorn, such a foil in his old-fashioned rusty black to Lady Dedlock’s brightness, hands her down the staircase to her carriage. He returns rubbing his chin, and rubs it a good deal in the course of the evening.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A Turn of the Screw

"NOW, WHAT," SAYS MR. George, "may this be? Is it blank cartridge or ball? A flash in the pan or a shot?"

An open letter is the subject of the trooper's speculations, and it seems to perplex him mightily. He looks at it at arm's length, brings it close to him, holds it in his right hand, holds it in his left hand, reads it with his head on this side, with his head on that side, contracts his eyebrows, elevates them, still cannot satisfy himself. He smooths it out upon the table with his heavy palm, and thoughtfully walking up and down the gallery, makes a halt before it every now and then to come upon it with a fresh eye. Even that won't do. "Is it," Mr. George still muses, "blank cartridge or ball?"

Phil Squod, with the aid of a brush and paint-pot, is employed in the distance whitening the targets, softly whistling in quick-march time and in drum-and-fife manner that he must and will go back again to the girl he left behind him.

"Phil!" The trooper beckons as he calls him.

Phil approaches in his usual way, sidling off at first as if he were going anywhere else and then bearing down upon his commander like a bayonet-charge. Certain splashes of white show in high relief upon his dirty face, and he scrapes his one eyebrow with the handle of the brush.

"Attention, Phil! Listen to this."

"Steady, commander, steady."

"'Sir. Allow me to remind you (though there is no legal necessity for my doing so, as you are aware) that the bill at two months' date drawn on yourself by Mr. Matthew Bagnet, and by you accepted, for the sum of ninety-seven pounds four shillings and ninepence, will become due to-morrow, when you will please be prepared to take up the same on presentation. Yours, Joshua Smallweed.' What do you make of that, Phil?"

"Mischief, guv'ner."

"Why?"

“I think,” replies Phil after pensively tracing out a cross-wrinkle in his forehead with the brush-handle, “that mischeevious consequences is always meant when money’s asked for.”

“Lookye, Phil,” says the trooper, sitting on the table. “First and last, I have paid, I may say, half as much again as this principal in interest and one thing and another.”

Phil intimates by sidling back a pace or two, with a very unaccountable wrench of his wry face, that he does not regard the transaction as being made more promising by this incident.

“And lookye further, Phil,” says the trooper, staying his premature conclusions with a wave of his hand. “There has always been an understanding that this bill was to be what they call renewed. And it has been renewed no end of times. What do you say now?”

“I say that I think the times is come to a end at last.”

“You do? Humph! I am much of the same mind myself.”

“Joshua Smallweed is him that was brought here in a chair?”

“The same.”

“Guv’ner,” says Phil with exceeding gravity, “he’s a leech in his dispositions, he’s a screw and a wice in his actions, a snake in his twistings, and a lobster in his claws.”

Having thus expressively uttered his sentiments, Mr. Squod, after waiting a little to ascertain if any further remark be expected of him, gets back by his usual series of movements to the target he has in hand and vigorously signifies through his former musical medium that he must and he will return to that ideal young lady. George, having folded the letter, walks in that direction.

“There IS a way, commander,” says Phil, looking cunningly at him, “of settling this.”

“Paying the money, I suppose? I wish I could.”

Phil shakes his head. “No, guv’ner, no; not so bad as that. There IS a way,” says Phil with a highly artistic turn of his brush; “what I’m a-doing at present.”

“Whitewashing.”

Phil nods.

“A pretty way that would be! Do you know what would become of the Bagnets in that case? Do you know they would be ruined to pay off my old

scores? YOU'RE a moral character," says the trooper, eyeing him in his large way with no small indignation; "upon my life you are, Phil!"

Phil, on one knee at the target, is in course of protesting earnestly, though not without many allegorical scoops of his brush and smoothings of the white surface round the rim with his thumb, that he had forgotten the Bagnet responsibility and would not so much as injure a hair of the head of any member of that worthy family when steps are audible in the long passage without, and a cheerful voice is heard to wonder whether George is at home. Phil, with a look at his master, hobbles up, saying, "Here's the guv'ner, Mrs. Bagnet! Here he is!" and the old girl herself, accompanied by Mr. Bagnet, appears.

The old girl never appears in walking trim, in any season of the year, without a grey cloth cloak, coarse and much worn but very clean, which is, undoubtedly, the identical garment rendered so interesting to Mr. Bagnet by having made its way home to Europe from another quarter of the globe in company with Mrs. Bagnet and an umbrella. The latter faithful appendage is also invariably a part of the old girl's presence out of doors. It is of no colour known in this life and has a corrugated wooden crook for a handle, with a metallic object let into its prow, or beak, resembling a little model of a fanlight over a street door or one of the oval glasses out of a pair of spectacles, which ornamental object has not that tenacious capacity of sticking to its post that might be desired in an article long associated with the British army. The old girl's umbrella is of a flabby habit of waist and seems to be in need of stays—an appearance that is possibly referable to its having served through a series of years at home as a cupboard and on journeys as a carpet bag. She never puts it up, having the greatest reliance on her well-proved cloak with its capacious hood, but generally uses the instrument as a wand with which to point out joints of meat or bunches of greens in marketing or to arrest the attention of tradesmen by a friendly poke. Without her market-basket, which is a sort of wicker well with two flapping lids, she never stirs abroad. Attended by these her trusty companions, therefore, her honest sunburnt face looking cheerily out of a rough straw bonnet, Mrs. Bagnet now arrives, fresh-coloured and bright, in George's Shooting Gallery.

"Well, George, old fellow," says she, "and how do YOU do, this sunshiny morning?"

Giving him a friendly shake of the hand, Mrs. Bagnet draws a long breath after her walk and sits down to enjoy a rest. Having a faculty, matured on the tops of baggage-waggons and in other such positions, of resting easily anywhere, she perches on a rough bench, unties her bonnet-strings, pushes back her bonnet, crosses her arms, and looks perfectly comfortable.

Mr. Bagnet in the meantime has shaken hands with his old comrade and with Phil, on whom Mrs. Bagnet likewise bestows a good-humoured nod and smile.

"Now, George," said Mrs. Bagnet briskly, "here we are, Lignum and myself"—she often speaks of her husband by this appellation, on account, as it is supposed, of Lignum Vitae having been his old regimental nickname when they first became acquainted, in compliment to the extreme hardness and toughness of his physiognomy—"just looked in, we have, to make it all correct as usual about that security. Give him the new bill to sign, George, and he'll sign it like a man."

"I was coming to you this morning," observes the trooper reluctantly.

"Yes, we thought you'd come to us this morning, but we turned out early and left Woolwich, the best of boys, to mind his sisters and came to you instead—as you see! For Lignum, he's tied so close now, and gets so little exercise, that a walk does him good. But what's the matter, George?" asks Mrs. Bagnet, stopping in her cheerful talk. "You don't look yourself."

"I am not quite myself," returns the trooper; "I have been a little put out, Mrs. Bagnet."

Her bright quick eye catches the truth directly. "George!" holding up her forefinger. "Don't tell me there's anything wrong about that security of Lignum's! Don't do it, George, on account of the children!"

The trooper looks at her with a troubled visage.

"George," says Mrs. Bagnet, using both her arms for emphasis and occasionally bringing down her open hands upon her knees. "If you have allowed anything wrong to come to that security of Lignum's, and if you have let him in for it, and if you have put us in danger of being sold up—and I see sold up in your face, George, as plain as print—you have done a shameful action and have deceived us cruelly. I tell you, cruelly, George. There!"

Mr. Bagnet, otherwise as immovable as a pump or a lamp-post, puts his

large right hand on the top of his bald head as if to defend it from a shower-bath and looks with great uneasiness at Mrs. Bagnet.

"George," says that old girl, "I wonder at you! George, I am ashamed of you! George, I couldn't have believed you would have done it! I always knew you to be a rolling stone that gathered no moss, but I never thought you would have taken away what little moss there was for Bagnet and the children to lie upon. You know what a hard-working, steady-going chap he is. You know what Quebec and Malta and Woolwich are, and I never did think you would, or could, have had the heart to serve us so. Oh, George!" Mrs. Bagnet gathers up her cloak to wipe her eyes on in a very genuine manner, "How could you do it?"

Mrs. Bagnet ceasing, Mr. Bagnet removes his hand from his head as if the shower-bath were over and looks disconsolately at Mr. George, who has turned quite white and looks distressfully at the grey cloak and straw bonnet.

"Mat," says the trooper in a subdued voice, addressing him but still looking at his wife, "I am sorry you take it so much to heart, because I do hope it's not so bad as that comes to. I certainly have, this morning, received this letter"—which he reads aloud—"but I hope it may be set right yet. As to a rolling stone, why, what you say is true. I AM a rolling stone, and I never rolled in anybody's way, I fully believe, that I rolled the least good to. But it's impossible for an old vagabond comrade to like your wife and family better than I like 'em, Mat, and I trust you'll look upon me as forgivingly as you can. Don't think I've kept anything from you. I haven't had the letter more than a quarter of an hour."

"Old girl," murmurs Mr. Bagnet after a short silence, "will you tell him my opinion?"

"Oh! Why didn't he marry," Mrs. Bagnet answers, half laughing and half crying, "Joe Pouch's widder in North America? Then he wouldn't have got himself into these troubles."

"The old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, "puts it correct—why didn't you?"

"Well, she has a better husband by this time, I hope," returns the trooper. "Anyhow, here I stand, this present day, NOT married to Joe Pouch's widder. What shall I do? You see all I have got about me. It's not mine; it's yours. Give the word, and I'll sell off every morsel. If I could have hoped it would have brought in nearly the sum wanted, I'd have sold all long ago. Don't

believe that I'll leave you or yours in the lurch, Mat. I'd sell myself first. I only wish," says the trooper, giving himself a disparaging blow in the chest, "that I knew of any one who'd buy such a second-hand piece of old stores."

"Old girl," murmurs Mr. Bagnet, "give him another bit of my mind."

"George," says the old girl, "you are not so much to be blamed, on full consideration, except for ever taking this business without the means."

"And that was like me!" observes the penitent trooper, shaking his head. "Like me, I know."

"Silence! The old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, "is correct—in her way of giving my opinions—hear me out!"

"That was when you never ought to have asked for the security, George, and when you never ought to have got it, all things considered. But what's done can't be undone. You are always an honourable and straightforward fellow, as far as lays in your power, though a little flighty. On the other hand, you can't admit but what it's natural in us to be anxious with such a thing hanging over our heads. So forget and forgive all round, George. Come! Forget and forgive all round!"

Mrs. Bagnet, giving him one of her honest hands and giving her husband the other, Mr. George gives each of them one of his and holds them while he speaks.

"I do assure you both, there's nothing I wouldn't do to discharge this obligation. But whatever I have been able to scrape together has gone every two months in keeping it up. We have lived plainly enough here, Phil and I. But the gallery don't quite do what was expected of it, and it's not—in short, it's not the mint. It was wrong in me to take it? Well, so it was. But I was in a manner drawn into that step, and I thought it might steady me, and set me up, and you'll try to overlook my having such expectations, and upon my soul, I am very much obliged to you, and very much ashamed of myself." With these concluding words, Mr. George gives a shake to each of the hands he holds, and relinquishing them, backs a pace or two in a broad-chested, upright attitude, as if he had made a final confession and were immediately going to be shot with all military honours.

"George, hear me out!" says Mr. Bagnet, glancing at his wife. "Old girl, go on!"

Mr. Bagnet, being in this singular manner heard out, has merely to observe that the letter must be attended to without any delay, that it is

advisable that George and he should immediately wait on Mr. Smallweed in person, and that the primary object is to save and hold harmless Mr. Bagnet, who had none of the money. Mr. George, entirely assenting, puts on his hat and prepares to march with Mr. Bagnet to the enemy's camp.

"Don't you mind a woman's hasty word, George," says Mrs. Bagnet, patting him on the shoulder. "I trust my old Lignum to you, and I am sure you'll bring him through it."

The trooper returns that this is kindly said and that he WILL bring Lignum through it somehow. Upon which Mrs. Bagnet, with her cloak, basket, and umbrella, goes home, bright-eyed again, to the rest of her family, and the comrades sally forth on the hopeful errand of mollifying Mr. Smallweed.

Whether there are two people in England less likely to come satisfactorily out of any negotiation with Mr. Smallweed than Mr. George and Mr. Matthew Bagnet may be very reasonably questioned. Also, notwithstanding their martial appearance, broad square shoulders, and heavy tread, whether there are within the same limits two more simple and unaccustomed children in all the Smallweedy affairs of life. As they proceed with great gravity through the streets towards the region of Mount Pleasant, Mr. Bagnet, observing his companion to be thoughtful, considers it a friendly part to refer to Mrs. Bagnet's late sally.

"George, you know the old girl—she's as sweet and as mild as milk. But touch her on the children—or myself—and she's off like gunpowder."

"It does her credit, Mat!"

"George," says Mr. Bagnet, looking straight before him, "the old girl—can't do anything—that don't do her credit. More or less. I never say so. Discipline must be maintained."

"She's worth her weight in gold," says the trooper.

"In gold?" says Mr. Bagnet. "I'll tell you what. The old girl's weight—is twelve stone six. Would I take that weight—in any metal—for the old girl? No. Why not? Because the old girl's metal is far more precious—than the preciousest metal. And she's ALL metal!"

"You are right, Mat!"

"When she took me—and accepted of the ring—she 'listed under me and the children—heart and head, for life. She's that earnest," says Mr. Bagnet, "and true to her colours—that, touch us with a finger—and she turns out—and stands to her arms. If the old girl fires wide—once in a way—at the call

of duty—look over it, George. For she's loyal!"

"Why, bless her, Mat," returns the trooper, "I think the higher of her for it!"

"You are right!" says Mr. Bagnet with the warmest enthusiasm, though without relaxing the rigidity of a single muscle. "Think as high of the old girl—as the rock of Gibraltar—and still you'll be thinking low—of such merits. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained."

These encomiums bring them to Mount Pleasant and to Grandfather Smallweed's house. The door is opened by the perennial Judy, who, having surveyed them from top to toe with no particular favour, but indeed with a malignant sneer, leaves them standing there while she consults the oracle as to their admission. The oracle may be inferred to give consent from the circumstance of her returning with the words on her honey lips that they can come in if they want to it. Thus privileged, they come in and find Mr. Smallweed with his feet in the drawer of his chair as if it were a paper foot-bath and Mrs. Smallweed obscured with the cushion like a bird that is not to sing.

"My dear friend," says Grandfather Smallweed with those two lean affectionate arms of his stretched forth. "How de do? How de do? Who is our friend, my dear friend?"

"Why this," returns George, not able to be very conciliatory at first, "is Matthew Bagnet, who has obliged me in that matter of ours, you know."

"Oh! Mr. Bagnet? Surely!" The old man looks at him under his hand.

"Hope you're well, Mr. Bagnet? Fine man, Mr. George! Military air, sir!"

No chairs being offered, Mr. George brings one forward for Bagnet and one for himself. They sit down, Mr. Bagnet as if he had no power of bending himself, except at the hips, for that purpose.

"Judy," says Mr. Smallweed, "bring the pipe."

"Why, I don't know," Mr. George interposes, "that the young woman need give herself that trouble, for to tell you the truth, I am not inclined to smoke it to-day."

"Ain't you?" returns the old man. "Judy, bring the pipe."

"The fact is, Mr. Smallweed," proceeds George, "that I find myself in rather an unpleasant state of mind. It appears to me, sir, that your friend in the city has been playing tricks."

“Oh, dear no!” says Grandfather Smallweed. “He never does that!”

“Don’t he? Well, I am glad to hear it, because I thought it might be HIS doing. This, you know, I am speaking of. This letter.”

Grandfather Smallweed smiles in a very ugly way in recognition of the letter.

“What does it mean?” asks Mr. George.

“Judy,” says the old man. “Have you got the pipe? Give it to me. Did you say what does it mean, my good friend?”

“Aye! Now, come, come, you know, Mr. Smallweed,” urges the trooper, constraining himself to speak as smoothly and confidentially as he can, holding the open letter in one hand and resting the broad knuckles of the other on his thigh, “a good lot of money has passed between us, and we are face to face at the present moment, and are both well aware of the understanding there has always been. I am prepared to do the usual thing which I have done regularly and to keep this matter going. I never got a letter like this from you before, and I have been a little put about by it this morning, because here’s my friend Matthew Bagnet, who, you know, had none of the money—”

“I DON’T know it, you know,” says the old man quietly.

“Why, con-found you—it, I mean—I tell you so, don’t I?”

“Oh, yes, you tell me so,” returns Grandfather Smallweed. “But I don’t know it.”

“Well!” says the trooper, swallowing his fire. “I know it.”

Mr. Smallweed replies with excellent temper, “Ah! That’s quite another thing!” And adds, “But it don’t matter. Mr. Bagnet’s situation is all one, whether or no.”

The unfortunate George makes a great effort to arrange the affair comfortably and to propitiate Mr. Smallweed by taking him upon his own terms.

“That’s just what I mean. As you say, Mr. Smallweed, here’s Matthew Bagnet liable to be fixed whether or no. Now, you see, that makes his good lady very uneasy in her mind, and me too, for whereas I’m a harum-scarum sort of a good-for-nought that more kicks than halfpence come natural to, why he’s a steady family man, don’t you see? Now, Mr. Smallweed,” says the trooper, gaining confidence as he proceeds in his soldierly mode of doing business, “although you and I are good friends enough in a certain

sort of a way, I am well aware that I can't ask you to let my friend Bagnet off entirely."

"Oh, dear, you are too modest. You can ASK me anything, Mr. George." (There is an ogreish kind of jocularity in Grandfather Smallweed to-day.)

"And you can refuse, you mean, eh? Or not you so much, perhaps, as your friend in the city? Ha ha ha!"

"Ha ha ha!" echoes Grandfather Smallweed. In such a very hard manner and with eyes so particularly green that Mr. Bagnet's natural gravity is much deepened by the contemplation of that venerable man.

"Come!" says the sanguine George. "I am glad to find we can be pleasant, because I want to arrange this pleasantly. Here's my friend Bagnet, and here am I. We'll settle the matter on the spot, if you please, Mr. Smallweed, in the usual way. And you'll ease my friend Bagnet's mind, and his family's mind, a good deal if you'll just mention to him what our understanding is."

Here some shrill spectre cries out in a mocking manner, "Oh, good gracious! Oh!" Unless, indeed, it be the sportive Judy, who is found to be silent when the startled visitors look round, but whose chin has received a recent toss, expressive of derision and contempt. Mr. Bagnet's gravity becomes yet more profound.

"But I think you asked me, Mr. George"—old Smallweed, who all this time has had the pipe in his hand, is the speaker now—"I think you asked me, what did the letter mean?"

"Why, yes, I did," returns the trooper in his off-hand way, "but I don't care to know particularly, if it's all correct and pleasant."

Mr. Smallweed, purposely balking himself in an aim at the trooper's head, throws the pipe on the ground and breaks it to pieces.

"That's what it means, my dear friend. I'll smash you. I'll crumble you. I'll powder you. Go to the devil!"

The two friends rise and look at one another. Mr. Bagnet's gravity has now attained its profoundest point.

"Go to the devil!" repeats the old man. "I'll have no more of your pipe-smokings and swaggerings. What? You're an independent dragoon, too! Go to my lawyer (you remember where; you have been there before) and show your independence now, will you? Come, my dear friend, there's a chance for you. Open the street door, Judy; put these blusterers out! Call in help if

they don’t go. Put ’em out!”

He vociferates this so loudly that Mr. Bagnet, laying his hands on the shoulders of his comrade before the latter can recover from his amazement, gets him on the outside of the street door, which is instantly slammed by the triumphant Judy. Utterly confounded, Mr. George awhile stands looking at the knocker. Mr. Bagnet, in a perfect abyss of gravity, walks up and down before the little parlour window like a sentry and looks in every time he passes, apparently revolving something in his mind.

“Come, Mat,” says Mr. George when he has recovered himself, “we must try the lawyer. Now, what do you think of this rascal?”

Mr. Bagnet, stopping to take a farewell look into the parlour, replies with one shake of his head directed at the interior, “If my old girl had been here —I’d have told him!” Having so discharged himself of the subject of his cogitations, he falls into step and marches off with the trooper, shoulder to shoulder.

When they present themselves in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Mr. Tulkinghorn is engaged and not to be seen. He is not at all willing to see them, for when they have waited a full hour, and the clerk, on his bell being rung, takes the opportunity of mentioning as much, he brings forth no more encouraging message than that Mr. Tulkinghorn has nothing to say to them and they had better not wait. They do wait, however, with the perseverance of military tactics, and at last the bell rings again and the client in possession comes out of Mr. Tulkinghorn’s room.

The client is a handsome old lady, no other than Mrs. Rouncewell, housekeeper at Chesney Wold. She comes out of the sanctuary with a fair old-fashioned curtsy and softly shuts the door. She is treated with some distinction there, for the clerk steps out of his pew to show her through the outer office and to let her out. The old lady is thanking him for his attention when she observes the comrades in waiting.

“I beg your pardon, sir, but I think those gentlemen are military?”

The clerk referring the question to them with his eye, and Mr. George not turning round from the almanac over the fire-place. Mr. Bagnet takes upon himself to reply, “Yes, ma’am. Formerly.”

“I thought so. I was sure of it. My heart warms, gentlemen, at the sight of you. It always does at the sight of such. God bless you, gentlemen! You’ll excuse an old woman, but I had a son once who went for a soldier. A

fine handsome youth he was, and good in his bold way, though some people did disparage him to his poor mother. I ask your pardon for troubling you, sir. God bless you, gentlemen!”

“Same to you, ma’am!” returns Mr. Bagnet with right good will.

There is something very touching in the earnestness of the old lady’s voice and in the tremble that goes through her quaint old figure. But Mr. George is so occupied with the almanac over the fire-place (calculating the coming months by it perhaps) that he does not look round until she has gone away and the door is closed upon her.

“George,” Mr. Bagnet gruffly whispers when he does turn from the almanac at last. “Don’t be cast down! ‘Why, soldiers, why—should we be melancholy, boys?’ Cheer up, my hearty!”

The clerk having now again gone in to say that they are still there and Mr. Tulkinghorn being heard to return with some irascibility, “Let ’em come in then!” they pass into the great room with the painted ceiling and find him standing before the fire.

“Now, you men, what do you want? Sergeant, I told you the last time I saw you that I don’t desire your company here.”

Sergeant replies—dashed within the last few minutes as to his usual manner of speech, and even as to his usual carriage—that he has received this letter, has been to Mr. Smallweed about it, and has been referred there.

“I have nothing to say to you,” rejoins Mr. Tulkinghorn. “If you get into debt, you must pay your debts or take the consequences. You have no occasion to come here to learn that, I suppose?”

Sergeant is sorry to say that he is not prepared with the money.

“Very well! Then the other man—this man, if this is he—must pay it for you.”

Sergeant is sorry to add that the other man is not prepared with the money either.

“Very well! Then you must pay it between you or you must both be sued for it and both suffer. You have had the money and must refund it. You are not to pocket other people’s pounds, shillings, and pence and escape scot-free.”

The lawyer sits down in his easy-chair and stirs the fire. Mr. George hopes he will have the goodness to—“I tell you, sergeant, I have nothing to say to you. I don’t like your associates and don’t want you here. This matter

is not at all in my course of practice and is not in my office. Mr. Smallweed is good enough to offer these affairs to me, but they are not in my way. You must go to Melchisedech's in Clifford's Inn."

"I must make an apology to you, sir," says Mr. George, "for pressing myself upon you with so little encouragement—which is almost as unpleasant to me as it can be to you—but would you let me say a private word to you?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn rises with his hands in his pockets and walks into one of the window recesses. "Now! I have no time to waste." In the midst of his perfect assumption of indifference, he directs a sharp look at the trooper, taking care to stand with his own back to the light and to have the other with his face towards it.

"Well, sir," says Mr. George, "this man with me is the other party implicated in this unfortunate affair—nominally, only nominally—and my sole object is to prevent his getting into trouble on my account. He is a most respectable man with a wife and family, formerly in the Royal Artillery—"

"My friend, I don't care a pinch of snuff for the whole Royal Artillery establishment—officers, men, tumbrils, waggons, horses, guns, and ammunition."

"'Tis likely, sir. But I care a good deal for Bagnet and his wife and family being injured on my account. And if I could bring them through this matter, I should have no help for it but to give up without any other consideration what you wanted of me the other day."

"Have you got it here?"

"I have got it here, sir."

"Sergeant," the lawyer proceeds in his dry passionless manner, far more hopeless in the dealing with than any amount of vehemence, "make up your mind while I speak to you, for this is final. After I have finished speaking I have closed the subject, and I won't re-open it. Understand that. You can leave here, for a few days, what you say you have brought here if you choose; you can take it away at once if you choose. In case you choose to leave it here, I can do this for you—I can replace this matter on its old footing, and I can go so far besides as to give you a written undertaking that this man Bagnet shall never be troubled in any way until you have been proceeded against to the utmost, that your means shall be exhausted before the creditor looks to his. This is in fact all but freeing him. Have you

decided?”

The trooper puts his hand into his breast and answers with a long breath, “I must do it, sir.”

So Mr. Tulkinghorn, putting on his spectacles, sits down and writes the undertaking, which he slowly reads and explains to Bagnet, who has all this time been staring at the ceiling and who puts his hand on his bald head again, under this new verbal shower-bath, and seems exceedingly in need of the old girl through whom to express his sentiments. The trooper then takes from his breast-pocket a folded paper, which he lays with an unwilling hand at the lawyer’s elbow. “’Tis only a letter of instructions, sir. The last I ever had from him.”

Look at a millstone, Mr. George, for some change in its expression, and you will find it quite as soon as in the face of Mr. Tulkinghorn when he opens and reads the letter! He refolds it and lays it in his desk with a countenance as unperturbable as death.

Nor has he anything more to say or do but to nod once in the same frigid and discourteous manner and to say briefly, “You can go. Show these men out, there!” Being shown out, they repair to Mr. Bagnet’s residence to dine.

Boiled beef and greens constitute the day’s variety on the former repast of boiled pork and greens, and Mrs. Bagnet serves out the meal in the same way and seasons it with the best of temper, being that rare sort of old girl that she receives Good to her arms without a hint that it might be Better and catches light from any little spot of darkness near her. The spot on this occasion is the darkened brow of Mr. George; he is unusually thoughtful and depressed. At first Mrs. Bagnet trusts to the combined endearments of Quebec and Malta to restore him, but finding those young ladies sensible that their existing Bluffy is not the Bluffy of their usual frolicsome acquaintance, she winks off the light infantry and leaves him to deploy at leisure on the open ground of the domestic hearth.

But he does not. He remains in close order, clouded and depressed. During the lengthy cleaning up and pattening process, when he and Mr. Bagnet are supplied with their pipes, he is no better than he was at dinner. He forgets to smoke, looks at the fire and ponders, lets his pipe out, fills the breast of Mr. Bagnet with perturbation and dismay by showing that he has no enjoyment of tobacco.

Therefore when Mrs. Bagnet at last appears, rosy from the invigorating

pail, and sits down to her work, Mr. Bagnet growls, “Old girl!” and winks monitions to her to find out what’s the matter.

“Why, George!” says Mrs. Bagnet, quietly threading her needle. “How low you are!”

“Am I? Not good company? Well, I am afraid I am not.”

“He ain’t at all like Bluffy, mother!” cries little Malta.

“Because he ain’t well, I think, mother,” adds Quebec.

“Sure that’s a bad sign not to be like Bluffy, too!” returns the trooper, kissing the young damsels. “But it’s true,” with a sigh, “true, I am afraid. These little ones are always right!”

“George,” says Mrs. Bagnet, working busily, “if I thought you cross enough to think of anything that a shrill old soldier’s wife—who could have bitten her tongue off afterwards and ought to have done it almost—said this morning, I don’t know what I shouldn’t say to you now.”

“My kind soul of a darling,” returns the trooper. “Not a morsel of it.”

“Because really and truly, George, what I said and meant to say was that I trusted Lignum to you and was sure you’d bring him through it. And you HAVE brought him through it, noble!”

“Thankee, my dear!” says George. “I am glad of your good opinion.”

In giving Mrs. Bagnet’s hand, with her work in it, a friendly shake—for she took her seat beside him—the trooper’s attention is attracted to her face. After looking at it for a little while as she plies her needle, he looks to young Woolwich, sitting on his stool in the corner, and beckons that fifer to him.

“See there, my boy,” says George, very gently smoothing the mother’s hair with his hand, “there’s a good loving forehead for you! All bright with love of you, my boy. A little touched by the sun and the weather through following your father about and taking care of you, but as fresh and wholesome as a ripe apple on a tree.”

Mr. Bagnet’s face expresses, so far as in its wooden material lies, the highest approbation and acquiescence.

“The time will come, my boy,” pursues the trooper, “when this hair of your mother’s will be grey, and this forehead all crossed and re-crossed with wrinkles, and a fine old lady she’ll be then. Take care, while you are young, that you can think in those days, ‘I never whitened a hair of her dear head—I never marked a sorrowful line in her face!’ For of all the many

things that you can think of when you are a man, you had better have THAT by you, Woolwich!”

Mr. George concludes by rising from his chair, seating the boy beside his mother in it, and saying, with something of a hurry about him, that he’ll smoke his pipe in the street a bit.

CHAPTER XXXV

Esther’s Narrative

I LAY ILL THROUGH several weeks, and the usual tenor of my life became like an old remembrance. But this was not the effect of time so much as of the change in all my habits made by the helplessness and inaction of a sick-room. Before I had been confined to it many days, everything else seemed to have retired into a remote distance where there was little or no separation between the various stages of my life which had been really divided by years. In falling ill, I seemed to have crossed a dark lake and to have left all my experiences, mingled together by the great distance, on the healthy shore.

My housekeeping duties, though at first it caused me great anxiety to think that they were unperformed, were soon as far off as the oldest of the old duties at Greenleaf or the summer afternoons when I went home from school with my portfolio under my arm, and my childish shadow at my side, to my godmother’s house. I had never known before how short life really was and into how small a space the mind could put it.

While I was very ill, the way in which these divisions of time became confused with one another distressed my mind exceedingly. At once a child, an elder girl, and the little woman I had been so happy as, I was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity of endlessly trying to reconcile them. I suppose that few who have not been in such a condition can quite understand what I mean or what painful unrest arose from this source.

For the same reason I am almost afraid to hint at that time in my disorder—it seemed one long night, but I believe there were both nights and days in it—when I laboured up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top, and ever turned, as I have seen a worm in a garden path, by some obstruction, and labouring again. I knew perfectly at intervals, and I think vaguely at most times, that I was in my bed; and I talked with Charley, and felt her touch, and knew her very well; yet I would find myself

complaining, “Oh, more of these never-ending stairs, Charley—more and more—piled up to the sky’, I think!” and labouring on again.

Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the dreadful thing?

Perhaps the less I say of these sick experiences, the less tedious and the more intelligible I shall be. I do not recall them to make others unhappy or because I am now the least unhappy in remembering them. It may be that if we knew more of such strange afflictions we might be the better able to alleviate their intensity.

The repose that succeeded, the long delicious sleep, the blissful rest, when in my weakness I was too calm to have any care for myself and could have heard (or so I think now) that I was dying, with no other emotion than with a pitying love for those I left behind—this state can be perhaps more widely understood. I was in this state when I first shrunk from the light as it twinkled on me once more, and knew with a boundless joy for which no words are rapturous enough that I should see again.

I had heard my Ada crying at the door, day and night; I had heard her calling to me that I was cruel and did not love her; I had heard her praying and imploring to be let in to nurse and comfort me and to leave my bedside no more; but I had only said, when I could speak, “Never, my sweet girl, never!” and I had over and over again reminded Charley that she was to keep my darling from the room whether I lived or died. Charley had been true to me in that time of need, and with her little hand and her great heart had kept the door fast.

But now, my sight strengthening and the glorious light coming every day more fully and brightly on me, I could read the letters that my dear wrote to me every morning and evening and could put them to my lips and lay my cheek upon them with no fear of hurting her. I could see my little maid, so tender and so careful, going about the two rooms setting everything in order and speaking cheerfully to Ada from the open window again. I could understand the stillness in the house and the thoughtfulness it expressed on the part of all those who had always been so good to me. I could weep in the exquisite felicity of my heart and be as happy in my weakness as ever I

had been in my strength.

By and by my strength began to be restored. Instead of lying, with so strange a calmness, watching what was done for me, as if it were done for some one else whom I was quietly sorry for, I helped it a little, and so on to a little more and much more, until I became useful to myself, and interested, and attached to life again.

How well I remember the pleasant afternoon when I was raised in bed with pillows for the first time to enjoy a great tea-drinking with Charley! The little creature—sent into the world, surely, to minister to the weak and sick—was so happy, and so busy, and stopped so often in her preparations to lay her head upon my bosom, and fondle me, and cry with joyful tears she was so glad, she was so glad, that I was obliged to say, "Charley, if you go on in this way, I must lie down again, my darling, for I am weaker than I thought I was!" So Charley became as quiet as a mouse and took her bright face here and there across and across the two rooms, out of the shade into the divine sunshine, and out of the sunshine into the shade, while I watched her peacefully. When all her preparations were concluded and the pretty tea-table with its little delicacies to tempt me, and its white cloth, and its flowers, and everything so lovingly and beautifully arranged for me by Ada downstairs, was ready at the bedside, I felt sure I was steady enough to say something to Charley that was not new to my thoughts.

First I complimented Charley on the room, and indeed it was so fresh and airy, so spotless and neat, that I could scarce believe I had been lying there so long. This delighted Charley, and her face was brighter than before.

"Yet, Charley," said I, looking round, "I miss something, surely, that I am accustomed to?"

Poor little Charley looked round too and pretended to shake her head as if there were nothing absent.

"Are the pictures all as they used to be?" I asked her.

"Every one of them, miss," said Charley.

"And the furniture, Charley?"

"Except where I have moved it about to make more room, miss."

"And yet," said I, "I miss some familiar object. Ah, I know what it is, Charley! It's the looking-glass."

Charley got up from the table, making as if she had forgotten something, and went into the next room; and I heard her sob there.

I had thought of this very often. I was now certain of it. I could thank God that it was not a shock to me now. I called Charley back, and when she came—at first pretending to smile, but as she drew nearer to me, looking grieved—I took her in my arms and said, “It matters very little, Charley. I hope I can do without my old face very well.”

I was presently so far advanced as to be able to sit up in a great chair and even giddily to walk into the adjoining room, leaning on Charley. The mirror was gone from its usual place in that room too, but what I had to bear was none the harder to bear for that.

My guardian had throughout been earnest to visit me, and there was now no good reason why I should deny myself that happiness. He came one morning, and when he first came in, could only hold me in his embrace and say, “My dear, dear girl!” I had long known—who could know better?—what a deep fountain of affection and generosity his heart was; and was it not worth my trivial suffering and change to fill such a place in it? “Oh, yes!” I thought. “He has seen me, and he loves me better than he did; he has seen me and is even fonder of me than he was before; and what have I to mourn for!”

He sat down by me on the sofa, supporting me with his arm. For a little while he sat with his hand over his face, but when he removed it, fell into his usual manner. There never can have been, there never can be, a pleasanter manner.

“My little woman,” said he, “what a sad time this has been. Such an inflexible little woman, too, through all!”

“Only for the best, guardian,” said I.

“For the best?” he repeated tenderly. “Of course, for the best. But here have Ada and I been perfectly forlorn and miserable; here has your friend Caddy been coming and going late and early; here has every one about the house been utterly lost and dejected; here has even poor Rick been writing —to ME too—in his anxiety for you!”

I had read of Caddy in Ada’s letters, but not of Richard. I told him so.

“Why, no, my dear,” he replied. “I have thought it better not to mention it to her.”

“And you speak of his writing to YOU,” said I, repeating his emphasis. “As if it were not natural for him to do so, guardian; as if he could write to a better friend!”

“He thinks he could, my love,” returned my guardian, “and to many a better. The truth is, he wrote to me under a sort of protest while unable to write to you with any hope of an answer—wrote coldly, haughtily, distantly, resentfully. Well, dearest little woman, we must look forbearingly on it. He is not to blame. Jarndyce and Jarndyce has warped him out of himself and perverted me in his eyes. I have known it do as bad deeds, and worse, many a time. If two angels could be concerned in it, I believe it would change their nature.”

“It has not changed yours, guardian.”

“Oh, yes, it has, my dear,” he said laughingly. “It has made the south wind easterly, I don’t know how often. Rick mistrusts and suspects me—goes to lawyers, and is taught to mistrust and suspect me. Hears I have conflicting interests, claims clashing against his and what not. Whereas, heaven knows that if I could get out of the mountains of wiglomeration on which my unfortunate name has been so long bestowed (which I can’t) or could level them by the extinction of my own original right (which I can’t either, and no human power ever can, anyhow, I believe, to such a pass have we got), I would do it this hour. I would rather restore to poor Rick his proper nature than be endowed with all the money that dead suitors, broken, heart and soul, upon the wheel of Chancery, have left unclaimed with the Accountant-General—and that’s money enough, my dear, to be cast into a pyramid, in memory of Chancery’s transcendent wickedness.”

“IS it possible, guardian,” I asked, amazed, “that Richard can be suspicious of you?”

“Ah, my love, my love,” he said, “it is in the subtle poison of such abuses to breed such diseases. His blood is infected, and objects lose their natural aspects in his sight. It is not HIS fault.”

“But it is a terrible misfortune, guardian.”

“It is a terrible misfortune, little woman, to be ever drawn within the influences of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. I know none greater. By little and little he has been induced to trust in that rotten reed, and it communicates some portion of its rottenness to everything around him. But again I say with all my soul, we must be patient with poor Rick and not blame him. What a troop of fine fresh hearts like his have I seen in my time turned by the same means!”

I could not help expressing something of my wonder and regret that his

benevolent, disinterested intentions had prospered so little.

"We must not say so, Dame Durden," he cheerfully replied; "Ada is the happier, I hope, and that is much. I did think that I and both these young creatures might be friends instead of distrustful foes and that we might so far counter-act the suit and prove too strong for it. But it was too much to expect. Jarndyce and Jarndyce was the curtain of Rick's cradle."

"But, guardian, may we not hope that a little experience will teach him what a false and wretched thing it is?"

"We WILL hope so, my Esther," said Mr. Jarndyce, "and that it may not teach him so too late. In any case we must not be hard on him. There are not many grown and matured men living while we speak, good men too, who if they were thrown into this same court as suitors would not be vitally changed and depreciated within three years—within two—within one. How can we stand amazed at poor Rick? A young man so unfortunate," here he fell into a lower tone, as if he were thinking aloud, "cannot at first believe (who could?) that Chancery is what it is. He looks to it, flushed and fitfully, to do something with his interests and bring them to some settlement. It procrastinates, disappoints, tries, tortures him; wears out his sanguine hopes and patience, thread by thread; but he still looks to it, and hankers after it, and finds his whole world treacherous and hollow. Well, well, well! Enough of this, my dear!"

He had supported me, as at first, all this time, and his tenderness was so precious to me that I leaned my head upon his shoulder and loved him as if he had been my father. I resolved in my own mind in this little pause, by some means, to see Richard when I grew strong and try to set him right.

"There are better subjects than these," said my guardian, "for such a joyful time as the time of our dear girl's recovery. And I had a commission to broach one of them as soon as I should begin to talk. When shall Ada come to see you, my love?"

I had been thinking of that too. A little in connexion with the absent mirrors, but not much, for I knew my loving girl would be changed by no change in my looks.

"Dear guardian," said I, "as I have shut her out so long—though indeed, indeed, she is like the light to me—"

"I know it well, Dame Durden, well."

He was so good, his touch expressed such endearing compassion and

affection, and the tone of his voice carried such comfort into my heart that I stopped for a little while, quite unable to go on. “Yes, yes, you are tired,” said he. “Rest a little.”

“As I have kept Ada out so long,” I began afresh after a short while, “I think I should like to have my own way a little longer, guardian. It would be best to be away from here before I see her. If Charley and I were to go to some country lodging as soon as I can move, and if I had a week there in which to grow stronger and to be revived by the sweet air and to look forward to the happiness of having Ada with me again, I think it would be better for us.”

I hope it was not a poor thing in me to wish to be a little more used to my altered self before I met the eyes of the dear girl I longed so ardently to see, but it is the truth. I did. He understood me, I was sure; but I was not afraid of that. If it were a poor thing, I knew he would pass it over.

“Our spoilt little woman,” said my guardian, “shall have her own way even in her inflexibility, though at the price, I know, of tears downstairs. And see here! Here is Boythorn, heart of chivalry, breathing such ferocious vows as never were breathed on paper before, that if you don’t go and occupy his whole house, he having already turned out of it expressly for that purpose, by heaven and by earth he’ll pull it down and not leave one brick standing on another!”

And my guardian put a letter in my hand, without any ordinary beginning such as “My dear Jarndyce,” but rushing at once into the words, “I swear if Miss Summerson do not come down and take possession of my house, which I vacate for her this day at one o’clock, P.M.,” and then with the utmost seriousness, and in the most emphatic terms, going on to make the extraordinary declaration he had quoted. We did not appreciate the writer the less for laughing heartily over it, and we settled that I should send him a letter of thanks on the morrow and accept his offer. It was a most agreeable one to me, for all the places I could have thought of, I should have liked to go to none so well as Chesney Wold.

“Now, little housewife,” said my guardian, looking at his watch, “I was strictly timed before I came upstairs, for you must not be tired too soon; and my time has waned away to the last minute. I have one other petition. Little Miss Flite, hearing a rumour that you were ill, made nothing of walking down here—twenty miles, poor soul, in a pair of dancing shoes—to inquire.

It was heaven's mercy we were at home, or she would have walked back again."

The old conspiracy to make me happy! Everybody seemed to be in it!

"Now, pet," said my guardian, "if it would not be irksome to you to admit the harmless little creature one afternoon before you save Boythorn's otherwise devoted house from demolition, I believe you would make her prouder and better pleased with herself than I—though my eminent name is Jarndyce—could do in a lifetime."

I have no doubt he knew there would be something in the simple image of the poor afflicted creature that would fall like a gentle lesson on my mind at that time. I felt it as he spoke to me. I could not tell him heartily enough how ready I was to receive her. I had always pitied her, never so much as now. I had always been glad of my little power to soothe her under her calamity, but never, never, half so glad before.

We arranged a time for Miss Flite to come out by the coach and share my early dinner. When my guardian left me, I turned my face away upon my couch and prayed to be forgiven if I, surrounded by such blessings, had magnified to myself the little trial that I had to undergo. The childish prayer of that old birthday when I had aspired to be industrious, contented, and true-hearted and to do good to some one and win some love to myself if I could came back into my mind with a reproachful sense of all the happiness I had since enjoyed and all the affectionate hearts that had been turned towards me. If I were weak now, what had I profited by those mercies? I repeated the old childish prayer in its old childish words and found that its old peace had not departed from it.

My guardian now came every day. In a week or so more I could walk about our rooms and hold long talks with Ada from behind the window-curtain. Yet I never saw her, for I had not as yet the courage to look at the dear face, though I could have done so easily without her seeing me.

On the appointed day Miss Flite arrived. The poor little creature ran into my room quite forgetful of her usual dignity, and crying from her very heart of hearts, "My dear Fitz Jarndyce!" fell upon my neck and kissed me twenty times.

"Dear me!" said she, putting her hand into her reticule, "I have nothing here but documents, my dear Fitz Jarndyce; I must borrow a pocket handkerchief."

Charley gave her one, and the good creature certainly made use of it, for she held it to her eyes with both hands and sat so, shedding tears for the next ten minutes.

"With pleasure, my dear Fitz Jarndyce," she was careful to explain. "Not the least pain. Pleasure to see you well again. Pleasure at having the honour of being admitted to see you. I am so much fonder of you, my love, than of the Chancellor. Though I DO attend court regularly. By the by, my dear, mentioning pocket handkerchiefs—"

Miss Flite here looked at Charley, who had been to meet her at the place where the coach stopped. Charley glanced at me and looked unwilling to pursue the suggestion.

"Ve-ry right!" said Miss Flite, "Ve-ry correct. Truly! Highly indiscreet of me to mention it; but my dear Miss Fitz Jarndyce, I am afraid I am at times (between ourselves, you wouldn't think it) a little—rambling you know," said Miss Flite, touching her forehead. "Nothing more."

"What were you going to tell me?" said I, smiling, for I saw she wanted to go on. "You have roused my curiosity, and now you must gratify it."

Miss Flite looked at Charley for advice in this important crisis, who said, "If you please, ma'am, you had better tell then," and therein gratified Miss Flite beyond measure.

"So sagacious, our young friend," said she to me in her mysterious way. "Diminutive. But ve-ry sagacious! Well, my dear, it's a pretty anecdote. Nothing more. Still I think it charming. Who should follow us down the road from the coach, my dear, but a poor person in a very ungenteel bonnet __"

"Jenny, if you please, miss," said Charley.

"Just so!" Miss Flite acquiesced with the greatest suavity. "Jenny. Ye-es! And what does she tell our young friend but that there has been a lady with a veil inquiring at her cottage after my dear Fitz Jarndyce's health and taking a handkerchief away with her as a little keepsake merely because it was my amiable Fitz Jarndyce's! Now, you know, so very prepossessing in the lady with the veil!"

"If you please, miss," said Charley, to whom I looked in some astonishment, "Jenny says that when her baby died, you left a handkerchief there, and that she put it away and kept it with the baby's little things. I think, if you please, partly because it was yours, miss, and partly because it

had covered the baby."

"Diminutive," whispered Miss Flite, making a variety of motions about her own forehead to express intellect in Charley. "But exceedingly sagacious! And so dear! My love, she's clearer than any counsel I ever heard!"

"Yes, Charley," I returned. "I remember it. Well?"

"Well, miss," said Charley, "and that's the handkerchief the lady took. And Jenny wants you to know that she wouldn't have made away with it herself for a heap of money but that the lady took it and left some money instead. Jenny don't know her at all, if you please, miss!"

"Why, who can she be?" said I.

"My love," Miss Flite suggested, advancing her lips to my ear with her most mysterious look, "in MY opinion—don't mention this to our diminutive friend—she's the Lord Chancellor's wife. He's married, you know. And I understand she leads him a terrible life. Throws his lordship's papers into the fire, my dear, if he won't pay the jeweller!"

I did not think very much about this lady then, for I had an impression that it might be Caddy. Besides, my attention was diverted by my visitor, who was cold after her ride and looked hungry and who, our dinner being brought in, required some little assistance in arraying herself with great satisfaction in a pitiable old scarf and a much-worn and often-mended pair of gloves, which she had brought down in a paper parcel. I had to preside, too, over the entertainment, consisting of a dish of fish, a roast fowl, a sweetbread, vegetables, pudding, and Madeira; and it was so pleasant to see how she enjoyed it, and with what state and ceremony she did honour to it, that I was soon thinking of nothing else.

When we had finished and had our little dessert before us, embellished by the hands of my dear, who would yield the superintendence of everything prepared for me to no one, Miss Flite was so very chatty and happy that I thought I would lead her to her own history, as she was always pleased to talk about herself. I began by saying "You have attended on the Lord Chancellor many years, Miss Flite?"

"Oh, many, many, many years, my dear. But I expect a judgment. Shortly."

There was an anxiety even in her hopefulness that made me doubtful if I had done right in approaching the subject. I thought I would say no more

about it.

"My father expected a judgment," said Miss Flite. "My brother. My sister. They all expected a judgment. The same that I expect."

"They are all—"

"Ye-es. Dead of course, my dear," said she.

As I saw she would go on, I thought it best to try to be serviceable to her by meeting the theme rather than avoiding it.

"Would it not be wiser," said I, "to expect this judgment no more?"

"Why, my dear," she answered promptly, "of course it would!"

"And to attend the court no more?"

"Equally of course," said she. "Very wearing to be always in expectation of what never comes, my dear Fitz Jarndyce! Wearing, I assure you, to the bone!"

She slightly showed me her arm, and it was fearfully thin indeed.

"But, my dear," she went on in her mysterious way, "there's a dreadful attraction in the place. Hush! Don't mention it to our diminutive friend when she comes in. Or it may frighten her. With good reason. There's a cruel attraction in the place. You CAN'T leave it. And you MUST expect."

I tried to assure her that this was not so. She heard me patiently and smilingly, but was ready with her own answer.

"Aye, aye, aye! You think so because I am a little rambling. Ve-ry absurd, to be a little rambling, is it not? Ve-ry confusing, too. To the head. I find it so. But, my dear, I have been there many years, and I have noticed. It's the mace and seal upon the table."

What could they do, did she think? I mildly asked her.

"Draw," returned Miss Flite. "Draw people on, my dear. Draw peace out of them. Sense out of them. Good looks out of them. Good qualities out of them. I have felt them even drawing my rest away in the night. Cold and glittering devils!"

She tapped me several times upon the arm and nodded good-humouredly as if she were anxious I should understand that I had no cause to fear her, though she spoke so gloomily, and confided these awful secrets to me.

"Let me see," said she. "I'll tell you my own case. Before they ever drew me—before I had ever seen them—what was it I used to do? Tambourine playing? No. Tambour work. I and my sister worked at tambour work. Our father and our brother had a builder's business. We all lived together. Ve-ry

respectably, my dear! First, our father was drawn—slowly. Home was drawn with him. In a few years he was a fierce, sour, angry bankrupt without a kind word or a kind look for any one. He had been so different, Fitz Jarndyce. He was drawn to a debtors' prison. There he died. Then our brother was drawn—swiftly—to drunkenness. And rags. And death. Then my sister was drawn. Hush! Never ask to what! Then I was ill and in misery, and heard, as I had often heard before, that this was all the work of Chancery. When I got better, I went to look at the monster. And then I found out how it was, and I was drawn to stay there."

Having got over her own short narrative, in the delivery of which she had spoken in a low, strained voice, as if the shock were fresh upon her, she gradually resumed her usual air of amiable importance.

"You don't quite credit me, my dear! Well, well! You will, some day. I am a little rambling. But I have noticed. I have seen many new faces come, unsuspicious, within the influence of the mace and seal in these many years. As my father's came there. As my brother's. As my sister's. As my own. I hear Conversation Kenge and the rest of them say to the new faces, 'Here's little Miss Flite. Oh, you are new here; and you must come and be presented to little Miss Flite!' Ve-ry good. Proud I am sure to have the honour! And we all laugh. But, Fitz Jarndyce, I know what will happen. I know, far better than they do, when the attraction has begun. I know the signs, my dear. I saw them begin in Gridley. And I saw them end. Fitz Jarndyce, my love," speaking low again, "I saw them beginning in our friend the ward in Jarndyce. Let some one hold him back. Or he'll be drawn to ruin."

She looked at me in silence for some moments, with her face gradually softening into a smile. Seeming to fear that she had been too gloomy, and seeming also to lose the connexion in her mind, she said politely as she sipped her glass of wine, "Yes, my dear, as I was saying, I expect a judgment shortly. Then I shall release my birds, you know, and confer estates."

I was much impressed by her allusion to Richard and by the sad meaning, so sadly illustrated in her poor pinched form, that made its way through all her incoherence. But happily for her, she was quite complacent again now and beamed with nods and smiles.

"But, my dear," she said, gaily, reaching another hand to put it upon mine. "You have not congratulated me on my physician. Positively not

once, yet!”

I was obliged to confess that I did not quite know what she meant.

“My physician, Mr. Woodcourt, my dear, who was so exceedingly attentive to me. Though his services were rendered quite gratuitously. Until the Day of Judgment. I mean THE judgment that will dissolve the spell upon me of the mace and seal.”

“Mr. Woodcourt is so far away, now,” said I, “that I thought the time for such congratulation was past, Miss Flite.”

“But, my child,” she returned, “is it possible that you don’t know what has happened?”

“No,” said I.

“Not what everybody has been talking of, my beloved Fitz Jarndyce!”

“No,” said I. “You forget how long I have been here.”

“True! My dear, for the moment—true. I blame myself. But my memory has been drawn out of me, with everything else, by what I mentioned. Ve-ry strong influence, is it not? Well, my dear, there has been a terrible shipwreck over in those East Indian seas.”

“Mr. Woodcourt shipwrecked!”

“Don’t be agitated, my dear. He is safe. An awful scene. Death in all shapes. Hundreds of dead and dying. Fire, storm, and darkness. Numbers of the drowning thrown upon a rock. There, and through it all, my dear physician was a hero. Calm and brave through everything. Saved many lives, never complained in hunger and thirst, wrapped naked people in his spare clothes, took the lead, showed them what to do, governed them, tended the sick, buried the dead, and brought the poor survivors safely off at last! My dear, the poor emaciated creatures all but worshipped him. They fell down at his feet when they got to the land and blessed him. The whole country rings with it. Stay! Where’s my bag of documents? I have got it there, and you shall read it, you shall read it!”

And I DID read all the noble history, though very slowly and imperfectly then, for my eyes were so dimmed that I could not see the words, and I cried so much that I was many times obliged to lay down the long account she had cut out of the newspaper. I felt so triumphant ever to have known the man who had done such generous and gallant deeds, I felt such glowing exultation in his renown, I so admired and loved what he had done, that I envied the storm-worn people who had fallen at his feet and blessed him as

their preserver. I could myself have kneeled down then, so far away, and blessed him in my rapture that he should be so truly good and brave. I felt that no one—mother, sister, wife—could honour him more than I. I did, indeed!

My poor little visitor made me a present of the account, and when as the evening began to close in she rose to take her leave, lest she should miss the coach by which she was to return, she was still full of the shipwreck, which I had not yet sufficiently composed myself to understand in all its details.

"My dear," said she as she carefully folded up her scarf and gloves, "my brave physician ought to have a title bestowed upon him. And no doubt he will. You are of that opinion?"

That he well deserved one, yes. That he would ever have one, no.

"Why not, Fitz Jarndyce?" she asked rather sharply.

I said it was not the custom in England to confer titles on men distinguished by peaceful services, however good and great, unless occasionally when they consisted of the accumulation of some very large amount of money.

"Why, good gracious," said Miss Flite, "how can you say that? Surely you know, my dear, that all the greatest ornaments of England in knowledge, imagination, active humanity, and improvement of every sort are added to its nobility! Look round you, my dear, and consider. YOU must be rambling a little now, I think, if you don't know that this is the great reason why titles will always last in the land!"

I am afraid she believed what she said, for there were moments when she was very mad indeed.

And now I must part with the little secret I have thus far tried to keep. I had thought, sometimes, that Mr. Woodcourt loved me and that if he had been richer he would perhaps have told me that he loved me before he went away. I had thought, sometimes, that if he had done so, I should have been glad of it. But how much better it was now that this had never happened! What should I have suffered if I had had to write to him and tell him that the poor face he had known as mine was quite gone from me and that I freely released him from his bondage to one whom he had never seen!

Oh, it was so much better as it was! With a great pang mercifully spared me, I could take back to my heart my childish prayer to be all he had so brightly shown himself; and there was nothing to be undone: no chain for

me to break or for him to drag; and I could go, please God, my lowly way along the path of duty, and he could go his nobler way upon its broader road; and though we were apart upon the journey, I might aspire to meet him, unselfishly, innocently, better far than he had thought me when I found some favour in his eyes, at the journey’s end.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Chesney Wold

CHARLEY AND I DID not set off alone upon our expedition into Lincolnshire. My guardian had made up his mind not to lose sight of me until I was safe in Mr. Boythorn's house, so he accompanied us, and we were two days upon the road. I found every breath of air, and every scent, and every flower and leaf and blade of grass, and every passing cloud, and everything in nature, more beautiful and wonderful to me than I had ever found it yet. This was my first gain from my illness. How little I had lost, when the wide world was so full of delight for me.

My guardian intending to go back immediately, we appointed, on our way down, a day when my dear girl should come. I wrote her a letter, of which he took charge, and he left us within half an hour of our arrival at our destination, on a delightful evening in the early summer-time.

If a good fairy had built the house for me with a wave of her wand, and I had been a princess and her favoured god-child, I could not have been more considered in it. So many preparations were made for me and such an endearing remembrance was shown of all my little tastes and likings that I could have sat down, overcome, a dozen times before I had revisited half the rooms. I did better than that, however, by showing them all to Charley instead. Charley's delight calmed mine; and after we had had a walk in the garden, and Charley had exhausted her whole vocabulary of admiring expressions, I was as tranquilly happy as I ought to have been. It was a great comfort to be able to say to myself after tea, "Esther, my dear, I think you are quite sensible enough to sit down now and write a note of thanks to your host." He had left a note of welcome for me, as sunny as his own face, and had confided his bird to my care, which I knew to be his highest mark of confidence. Accordingly I wrote a little note to him in London, telling him how all his favourite plants and trees were looking, and how the most astonishing of birds had chirped the honours of the house to me in the most hospitable manner, and how, after singing on my shoulder, to the

inconceivable rapture of my little maid, he was then at roost in the usual corner of his cage, but whether dreaming or no I could not report. My note finished and sent off to the post, I made myself very busy in unpacking and arranging; and I sent Charley to bed in good time and told her I should want her no more that night.

For I had not yet looked in the glass and had never asked to have my own restored to me. I knew this to be a weakness which must be overcome, but I had always said to myself that I would begin afresh when I got to where I now was. Therefore I had wanted to be alone, and therefore I said, now alone, in my own room, "Esther, if you are to be happy, if you are to have any right to pray to be true-hearted, you must keep your word, my dear." I was quite resolved to keep it, but I sat down for a little while first to reflect upon all my blessings. And then I said my prayers and thought a little more.

My hair had not been cut off, though it had been in danger more than once. It was long and thick. I let it down, and shook it out, and went up to the glass upon the dressing-table. There was a little muslin curtain drawn across it. I drew it back and stood for a moment looking through such a veil of my own hair that I could see nothing else. Then I put my hair aside and looked at the reflection in the mirror, encouraged by seeing how placidly it looked at me. I was very much changed—oh, very, very much. At first my face was so strange to me that I think I should have put my hands before it and started back but for the encouragement I have mentioned. Very soon it became more familiar, and then I knew the extent of the alteration in it better than I had done at first. It was not like what I had expected, but I had expected nothing definite, and I dare say anything definite would have surprised me.

I had never been a beauty and had never thought myself one, but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me that I could let it go with a few not bitter tears and could stand there arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully.

One thing troubled me, and I considered it for a long time before I went to sleep. I had kept Mr. Woodcourt's flowers. When they were withered I had dried them and put them in a book that I was fond of. Nobody knew this, not even Ada. I was doubtful whether I had a right to preserve what he had sent to one so different—whether it was generous towards him to do it.

I wished to be generous to him, even in the secret depths of my heart, which he would never know, because I could have loved him—could have been devoted to him. At last I came to the conclusion that I might keep them if I treasured them only as a remembrance of what was irrevocably past and gone, never to be looked back on any more, in any other light. I hope this may not seem trivial. I was very much in earnest.

I took care to be up early in the morning and to be before the glass when Charley came in on tiptoe.

"Dear, dear, miss!" cried Charley, starting. "Is that you?"

"Yes, Charley," said I, quietly putting up my hair. "And I am very well indeed, and very happy."

I saw it was a weight off Charley's mind, but it was a greater weight off mine. I knew the worst now and was composed to it. I shall not conceal, as I go on, the weaknesses I could not quite conquer, but they always passed from me soon and the happier frame of mind stayed by me faithfully.

Wishing to be fully re-established in my strength and my good spirits before Ada came, I now laid down a little series of plans with Charley for being in the fresh air all day long. We were to be out before breakfast, and were to dine early, and were to be out again before and after dinner, and were to talk in the garden after tea, and were to go to rest betimes, and were to climb every hill and explore every road, lane, and field in the neighbourhood. As to restoratives and strengthening delicacies, Mr. Boythorn's good housekeeper was for ever trotting about with something to eat or drink in her hand; I could not even be heard of as resting in the park but she would come trotting after me with a basket, her cheerful face shining with a lecture on the importance of frequent nourishment. Then there was a pony expressly for my riding, a chubby pony with a short neck and a mane all over his eyes who could canter—when he would—so easily and quietly that he was a treasure. In a very few days he would come to me in the paddock when I called him, and eat out of my hand, and follow me about. We arrived at such a capital understanding that when he was jogging with me lazily, and rather obstinately, down some shady lane, if I patted his neck and said, "Stubbs, I am surprised you don't canter when you know how much I like it; and I think you might oblige me, for you are only getting stupid and going to sleep," he would give his head a comical shake or two and set off directly, while Charley would stand still and laugh with

such enjoyment that her laughter was like music. I don’t know who had given Stubbs his name, but it seemed to belong to him as naturally as his rough coat. Once we put him in a little chaise and drove him triumphantly through the green lanes for five miles; but all at once, as we were extolling him to the skies, he seemed to take it ill that he should have been accompanied so far by the circle of tantalizing little gnats that had been hovering round and round his ears the whole way without appearing to advance an inch, and stopped to think about it. I suppose he came to the decision that it was not to be borne, for he steadily refused to move until I gave the reins to Charley and got out and walked, when he followed me with a sturdy sort of good humour, putting his head under my arm and rubbing his ear against my sleeve. It was in vain for me to say, “Now, Stubbs, I feel quite sure from what I know of you that you will go on if I ride a little while,” for the moment I left him, he stood stock still again. Consequently I was obliged to lead the way, as before; and in this order we returned home, to the great delight of the village.

Charley and I had reason to call it the most friendly of villages, I am sure, for in a week’s time the people were so glad to see us go by, though ever so frequently in the course of a day, that there were faces of greeting in every cottage. I had known many of the grown people before and almost all the children, but now the very steeple began to wear a familiar and affectionate look. Among my new friends was an old old woman who lived in such a little thatched and whitewashed dwelling that when the outside shutter was turned up on its hinges, it shut up the whole house-front. This old lady had a grandson who was a sailor, and I wrote a letter to him for her and drew at the top of it the chimney-corner in which she had brought him up and where his old stool yet occupied its old place. This was considered by the whole village the most wonderful achievement in the world, but when an answer came back all the way from Plymouth, in which he mentioned that he was going to take the picture all the way to America, and from America would write again, I got all the credit that ought to have been given to the post-office and was invested with the merit of the whole system.

Thus, what with being so much in the air, playing with so many children, gossiping with so many people, sitting on invitation in so many cottages, going on with Charley’s education, and writing long letters to Ada every

day, I had scarcely any time to think about that little loss of mine and was almost always cheerful. If I did think of it at odd moments now and then, I had only to be busy and forget it. I felt it more than I had hoped I should once when a child said, “Mother, why is the lady not a pretty lady now like she used to be?” But when I found the child was not less fond of me, and drew its soft hand over my face with a kind of pitying protection in its touch, that soon set me up again. There were many little occurrences which suggested to me, with great consolation, how natural it is to gentle hearts to be considerate and delicate towards any inferiority. One of these particularly touched me. I happened to stroll into the little church when a marriage was just concluded, and the young couple had to sign the register.

The bridegroom, to whom the pen was handed first, made a rude cross for his mark; the bride, who came next, did the same. Now, I had known the bride when I was last there, not only as the prettiest girl in the place, but as having quite distinguished herself in the school, and I could not help looking at her with some surprise. She came aside and whispered to me, while tears of honest love and admiration stood in her bright eyes, “He’s a dear good fellow, miss; but he can’t write yet—he’s going to learn of me—and I wouldn’t shame him for the world!” Why, what had I to fear, I thought, when there was this nobility in the soul of a labouring man’s daughter!

The air blew as freshly and revivingly upon me as it had ever blown, and the healthy colour came into my new face as it had come into my old one. Charley was wonderful to see, she was so radiant and so rosy; and we both enjoyed the whole day and slept soundly the whole night.

There was a favourite spot of mine in the park-woods of Chesney Wold where a seat had been erected commanding a lovely view. The wood had been cleared and opened to improve this point of sight, and the bright sunny landscape beyond was so beautiful that I rested there at least once every day. A picturesque part of the Hall, called the Ghost’s Walk, was seen to advantage from this higher ground; and the startling name, and the old legend in the Dedlock family which I had heard from Mr. Boythorn accounting for it, mingled with the view and gave it something of a mysterious interest in addition to its real charms. There was a bank here, too, which was a famous one for violets; and as it was a daily delight of Charley’s to gather wild flowers, she took as much to the spot as I did.

It would be idle to inquire now why I never went close to the house or never went inside it. The family were not there, I had heard on my arrival, and were not expected. I was far from being incurious or uninterested about the building; on the contrary, I often sat in this place wondering how the rooms ranged and whether any echo like a footstep really did resound at times, as the story said, upon the lonely Ghost's Walk. The indefinable feeling with which Lady Dedlock had impressed me may have had some influence in keeping me from the house even when she was absent. I am not sure. Her face and figure were associated with it, naturally; but I cannot say that they repelled me from it, though something did. For whatever reason or no reason, I had never once gone near it, down to the day at which my story now arrives.

I was resting at my favourite point after a long ramble, and Charley was gathering violets at a little distance from me. I had been looking at the Ghost's Walk lying in a deep shade of masonry afar off and picturing to myself the female shape that was said to haunt it when I became aware of a figure approaching through the wood. The perspective was so long and so darkened by leaves, and the shadows of the branches on the ground made it so much more intricate to the eye, that at first I could not discern what figure it was. By little and little it revealed itself to be a woman's—a lady's—Lady Dedlock's. She was alone and coming to where I sat with a much quicker step, I observed to my surprise, than was usual with her.

I was fluttered by her being unexpectedly so near (she was almost within speaking distance before I knew her) and would have risen to continue my walk. But I could not. I was rendered motionless. Not so much by her hurried gesture of entreaty, not so much by her quick advance and outstretched hands, not so much by the great change in her manner and the absence of her haughty self-restraint, as by a something in her face that I had pined for and dreamed of when I was a little child, something I had never seen in any face, something I had never seen in hers before.

A dread and faintness fell upon me, and I called to Charley. Lady Dedlock stopped upon the instant and changed back almost to what I had known her.

"Miss Summerson, I am afraid I have startled you," she said, now advancing slowly. "You can scarcely be strong yet. You have been very ill, I know. I have been much concerned to hear it."

I could no more have removed my eyes from her pale face than I could have stirred from the bench on which I sat. She gave me her hand, and its deadly coldness, so at variance with the enforced composure of her features, deepened the fascination that overpowered me. I cannot say what was in my whirling thoughts.

"You are recovering again?" she asked kindly.

"I was quite well but a moment ago, Lady Dedlock."

"Is this your young attendant?"

"Yes."

"Will you send her on before and walk towards your house with me?"

"Charley," said I, "take your flowers home, and I will follow you directly."

Charley, with her best curtsy, blushingly tied on her bonnet and went her way. When she was gone, Lady Dedlock sat down on the seat beside me.

I cannot tell in any words what the state of my mind was when I saw in her hand my handkerchief with which I had covered the dead baby.

I looked at her, but I could not see her, I could not hear her, I could not draw my breath. The beating of my heart was so violent and wild that I felt as if my life were breaking from me. But when she caught me to her breast, kissed me, wept over me, compassionated me, and called me back to myself; when she fell down on her knees and cried to me, "Oh, my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! Oh, try to forgive me!"—when I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness, as that nobody could ever now look at me and look at her and remotely think of any near tie between us.

I raised my mother up, praying and beseeching her not to stoop before me in such affliction and humiliation. I did so in broken, incoherent words, for besides the trouble I was in, it frightened me to see her at MY feet. I told her—or I tried to tell her—that if it were for me, her child, under any circumstances to take upon me to forgive her, I did it, and had done it, many, many years. I told her that my heart overflowed with love for her, that it was natural love which nothing in the past had changed or could change. That it was not for me, then resting for the first time on my mother's bosom, to take her to account for having given me life, but that my

duty was to bless her and receive her, though the whole world turned from her, and that I only asked her leave to do it. I held my mother in my embrace, and she held me in hers, and among the still woods in the silence of the summer day there seemed to be nothing but our two troubled minds that was not at peace.

"To bless and receive me," groaned my mother, "it is far too late. I must travel my dark road alone, and it will lead me where it will. From day to day, sometimes from hour to hour, I do not see the way before my guilty feet. This is the earthly punishment I have brought upon myself. I bear it, and I hide it."

Even in the thinking of her endurance, she drew her habitual air of proud indifference about her like a veil, though she soon cast it off again.

"I must keep this secret, if by any means it can be kept, not wholly for myself. I have a husband, wretched and dishonouring creature that I am!"

These words she uttered with a suppressed cry of despair, more terrible in its sound than any shriek. Covering her face with her hands, she shrank down in my embrace as if she were unwilling that I should touch her; nor could I, by my utmost persuasions or by any endearments I could use, prevail upon her to rise. She said, no, no, no, she could only speak to me so; she must be proud and disdainful everywhere else; she would be humbled and ashamed there, in the only natural moments of her life.

My unhappy mother told me that in my illness she had been nearly frantic. She had but then known that her child was living. She could not have suspected me to be that child before. She had followed me down here to speak to me but once in all her life. We never could associate, never could communicate, never probably from that time forth could interchange another word on earth. She put into my hands a letter she had written for my reading only and said when I had read it and destroyed it—but not so much for her sake, since she asked nothing, as for her husband's and my own—I must evermore consider her as dead. If I could believe that she loved me, in this agony in which I saw her, with a mother's love, she asked me to do that, for then I might think of her with a greater pity, imagining what she suffered. She had put herself beyond all hope and beyond all help. Whether she preserved her secret until death or it came to be discovered and she brought dishonour and disgrace upon the name she had taken, it was her solitary struggle always; and no affection could come near her, and no

human creature could render her any aid.

"But is the secret safe so far?" I asked. "Is it safe now, dearest mother?"

"No," replied my mother. "It has been very near discovery. It was saved by an accident. It may be lost by another accident—to-morrow, any day."

"Do you dread a particular person?"

"Hush! Do not tremble and cry so much for me. I am not worthy of these tears," said my mother, kissing my hands. "I dread one person very much."

"An enemy?"

"Not a friend. One who is too passionless to be either. He is Sir Leicester Dedlock's lawyer, mechanically faithful without attachment, and very jealous of the profit, privilege, and reputation of being master of the mysteries of great houses."

"Has he any suspicions?"

"Many."

"Not of you?" I said alarmed.

"Yes! He is always vigilant and always near me. I may keep him at a standstill, but I can never shake him off."

"Has he so little pity or compunction?"

"He has none, and no anger. He is indifferent to everything but his calling. His calling is the acquisition of secrets and the holding possession of such power as they give him, with no sharer or opponent in it."

"Could you trust in him?"

"I shall never try. The dark road I have trodden for so many years will end where it will. I follow it alone to the end, whatever the end be. It may be near, it may be distant; while the road lasts, nothing turns me."

"Dear mother, are you so resolved?"

"I AM resolved. I have long outbidden folly with folly, pride with pride, scorn with scorn, insolence with insolence, and have outlived many vanities with many more. I will outlive this danger, and outdie it, if I can. It has closed around me almost as awfully as if these woods of Chesney Wold had closed around the house, but my course through it is the same. I have but one; I can have but one."

"Mr. Jarndyce—" I was beginning when my mother hurriedly inquired, "Does HE suspect?"

"No," said I. "No, indeed! Be assured that he does not!" And I told her what he had related to me as his knowledge of my story. "But he is so good

and sensible," said I, "that perhaps if he knew—"

My mother, who until this time had made no change in her position, raised her hand up to my lips and stopped me.

"Confide fully in him," she said after a little while. "You have my free consent—a small gift from such a mother to her injured child!—but do not tell me of it. Some pride is left in me even yet."

I explained, as nearly as I could then, or can recall now—for my agitation and distress throughout were so great that I scarcely understood myself, though every word that was uttered in the mother's voice, so unfamiliar and so melancholy to me, which in my childhood I had never learned to love and recognize, had never been sung to sleep with, had never heard a blessing from, had never had a hope inspired by, made an enduring impression on my memory—I say I explained, or tried to do it, how I had only hoped that Mr. Jarndyce, who had been the best of fathers to me, might be able to afford some counsel and support to her. But my mother answered no, it was impossible; no one could help her. Through the desert that lay before her, she must go alone.

"My child, my child!" she said. "For the last time! These kisses for the last time! These arms upon my neck for the last time! We shall meet no more. To hope to do what I seek to do, I must be what I have been so long. Such is my reward and doom. If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered, think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask! Think that the reality is in her suffering, in her useless remorse, in her murdering within her breast the only love and truth of which it is capable! And then forgive her if you can, and cry to heaven to forgive her, which it never can!"

We held one another for a little space yet, but she was so firm that she took my hands away, and put them back against my breast, and with a last kiss as she held them there, released them, and went from me into the wood. I was alone, and calm and quiet below me in the sun and shade lay the old house, with its terraces and turrets, on which there had seemed to me to be such complete repose when I first saw it, but which now looked like the obdurate and unpitying watcher of my mother's misery.

Stunned as I was, as weak and helpless at first as I had ever been in my sick chamber, the necessity of guarding against the danger of discovery, or even of the remotest suspicion, did me service. I took such precautions as I

could to hide from Charley that I had been crying, and I constrained myself to think of every sacred obligation that there was upon me to be careful and collected. It was not a little while before I could succeed or could even restrain bursts of grief, but after an hour or so I was better and felt that I might return. I went home very slowly and told Charley, whom I found at the gate looking for me, that I had been tempted to extend my walk after Lady Dedlock had left me and that I was over-tired and would lie down. Safe in my own room, I read the letter. I clearly derived from it—and that was much then—that I had not been abandoned by my mother. Her elder and only sister, the godmother of my childhood, discovering signs of life in me when I had been laid aside as dead, had in her stern sense of duty, with no desire or willingness that I should live, reared me in rigid secrecy and had never again beheld my mother's face from within a few hours of my birth. So strangely did I hold my place in this world that until within a short time back I had never, to my own mother's knowledge, breathed—had been buried—had never been endowed with life—had never borne a name. When she had first seen me in the church she had been startled and had thought of what would have been like me if it had ever lived, and had lived on, but that was all then.

What more the letter told me needs not to be repeated here. It has its own times and places in my story.

My first care was to burn what my mother had written and to consume even its ashes. I hope it may not appear very unnatural or bad in me that I then became heavily sorrowful to think I had ever been reared. That I felt as if I knew it would have been better and happier for many people if indeed I had never breathed. That I had a terror of myself as the danger and the possible disgrace of my own mother and of a proud family name. That I was so confused and shaken as to be possessed by a belief that it was right and had been intended that I should die in my birth, and that it was wrong and not intended that I should be then alive.

These are the real feelings that I had. I fell asleep worn out, and when I awoke I cried afresh to think that I was back in the world with my load of trouble for others. I was more than ever frightened of myself, thinking anew of her against whom I was a witness, of the owner of Chesney Wold, of the new and terrible meaning of the old words now moaning in my ear like a surge upon the shore, "Your mother, Esther, was your disgrace, and you are

hers. The time will come—and soon enough—when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can." With them, those other words returned, "Pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head." I could not disentangle all that was about me, and I felt as if the blame and the shame were all in me, and the visitation had come down.

The day waned into a gloomy evening, overcast and sad, and I still contended with the same distress. I went out alone, and after walking a little in the park, watching the dark shades falling on the trees and the fitful flight of the bats, which sometimes almost touched me, was attracted to the house for the first time. Perhaps I might not have gone near it if I had been in a stronger frame of mind. As it was, I took the path that led close by it.

I did not dare to linger or to look up, but I passed before the terrace garden with its fragrant odours, and its broad walks, and its well-kept beds and smooth turf; and I saw how beautiful and grave it was, and how the old stone balustrades and parapets, and wide flights of shallow steps, were seamed by time and weather; and how the trained moss and ivy grew about them, and around the old stone pedestal of the sun-dial; and I heard the fountain falling. Then the way went by long lines of dark windows diversified by turreted towers and porches of eccentric shapes, where old stone lions and grotesque monsters bristled outside dens of shadow and snarled at the evening gloom over the escutcheons they held in their grip. Thence the path wound underneath a gateway, and through a court-yard where the principal entrance was (I hurried quickly on), and by the stables where none but deep voices seemed to be, whether in the murmuring of the wind through the strong mass of ivy holding to a high red wall, or in the low complaining of the weathercock, or in the barking of the dogs, or in the slow striking of a clock. So, encountering presently a sweet smell of limes, whose rustling I could hear, I turned with the turning of the path to the south front, and there above me were the balustrades of the Ghost's Walk and one lighted window that might be my mother's.

The way was paved here, like the terrace overhead, and my footsteps from being noiseless made an echoing sound upon the flags. Stopping to look at nothing, but seeing all I did see as I went, I was passing quickly on, and in a few moments should have passed the lighted window, when my echoing footsteps brought it suddenly into my mind that there was a

dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk, that it was I who was to bring calamity upon the stately house and that my warning feet were haunting it even then. Seized with an augmented terror of myself which turned me cold, I ran from myself and everything, retraced the way by which I had come, and never paused until I had gained the lodge-gate, and the park lay sullen and black behind me.

Not before I was alone in my own room for the night and had again been dejected and unhappy there did I begin to know how wrong and thankless this state was. But from my darling who was coming on the morrow, I found a joyful letter, full of such loving anticipation that I must have been of marble if it had not moved me; from my guardian, too, I found another letter, asking me to tell Dame Durden, if I should see that little woman anywhere, that they had moped most pitiably without her, that the housekeeping was going to rack and ruin, that nobody else could manage the keys, and that everybody in and about the house declared it was not the same house and was becoming rebellious for her return. Two such letters together made me think how far beyond my deserts I was beloved and how happy I ought to be. That made me think of all my past life; and that brought me, as it ought to have done before, into a better condition.

For I saw very well that I could not have been intended to die, or I should never have lived; not to say should never have been reserved for such a happy life. I saw very well how many things had worked together for my welfare, and that if the sins of the fathers were sometimes visited upon the children, the phrase did not mean what I had in the morning feared it meant. I knew I was as innocent of my birth as a queen of hers and that before my Heavenly Father I should not be punished for birth nor a queen rewarded for it. I had had experience, in the shock of that very day, that I could, even thus soon, find comforting reconcilements to the change that had fallen on me. I renewed my resolutions and prayed to be strengthened in them, pouring out my heart for myself and for my unhappy mother and feeling that the darkness of the morning was passing away. It was not upon my sleep; and when the next day's light awoke me, it was gone.

My dear girl was to arrive at five o'clock in the afternoon. How to help myself through the intermediate time better than by taking a long walk along the road by which she was to come, I did not know; so Charley and I and Stubbs—Stubbs saddled, for we never drove him after the one great

occasion—made a long expedition along that road and back. On our return, we held a great review of the house and garden and saw that everything was in its prettiest condition, and had the bird out ready as an important part of the establishment.

There were more than two full hours yet to elapse before she could come, and in that interval, which seemed a long one, I must confess I was nervously anxious about my altered looks. I loved my darling so well that I was more concerned for their effect on her than on any one. I was not in this slight distress because I at all repined—I am quite certain I did not, that day—but, I thought, would she be wholly prepared? When she first saw me, might she not be a little shocked and disappointed? Might it not prove a little worse than she expected? Might she not look for her old Esther and not find her? Might she not have to grow used to me and to begin all over again?

I knew the various expressions of my sweet girl's face so well, and it was such an honest face in its loveliness, that I was sure beforehand she could not hide that first look from me. And I considered whether, if it should signify any one of these meanings, which was so very likely, could I quite answer for myself?

Well, I thought I could. After last night, I thought I could. But to wait and wait, and expect and expect, and think and think, was such bad preparation that I resolved to go along the road again and meet her.

So I said to Charley, "Charley, I will go by myself and walk along the road until she comes." Charley highly approving of anything that pleased me, I went and left her at home.

But before I got to the second milestone, I had been in so many palpitations from seeing dust in the distance (though I knew it was not, and could not, be the coach yet) that I resolved to turn back and go home again. And when I had turned, I was in such fear of the coach coming up behind me (though I still knew that it neither would, nor could, do any such thing) that I ran the greater part of the way to avoid being overtaken.

Then, I considered, when I had got safe back again, this was a nice thing to have done! Now I was hot and had made the worst of it instead of the best.

At last, when I believed there was at least a quarter of an hour more yet, Charley all at once cried out to me as I was trembling in the garden, "Here

she comes, miss! Here she is!”

I did not mean to do it, but I ran upstairs into my room and hid myself behind the door. There I stood trembling, even when I heard my darling calling as she came upstairs, “Esther, my dear, my love, where are you? Little woman, dear Dame Durden!”

She ran in, and was running out again when she saw me. Ah, my angel girl! The old dear look, all love, all fondness, all affection. Nothing else in it —no, nothing, nothing!

Oh, how happy I was, down upon the floor, with my sweet beautiful girl down upon the floor too, holding my scarred face to her lovely cheek, bathing it with tears and kisses, rocking me to and fro like a child, calling me by every tender name that she could think of, and pressing me to her faithful heart.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Jarndyce and Jarndyce

IF THE SECRET I had to keep had been mine, I must have confided it to Ada before we had been long together. But it was not mine, and I did not feel that I had a right to tell it, even to my guardian, unless some great emergency arose. It was a weight to bear alone; still my present duty appeared to be plain, and blest in the attachment of my dear, I did not want an impulse and encouragement to do it. Though often when she was asleep and all was quiet, the remembrance of my mother kept me waking and made the night sorrowful, I did not yield to it at another time; and Ada found me what I used to be—except, of course, in that particular of which I have said enough and which I have no intention of mentioning any more just now, if I can help it.

The difficulty that I felt in being quite composed that first evening when Ada asked me, over our work, if the family were at the house, and when I was obliged to answer yes, I believed so, for Lady Dedlock had spoken to me in the woods the day before yesterday, was great. Greater still when Ada asked me what she had said, and when I replied that she had been kind and interested, and when Ada, while admitting her beauty and elegance, remarked upon her proud manner and her imperious chilling air. But Charley helped me through, unconsciously, by telling us that Lady Dedlock had only stayed at the house two nights on her way from London to visit at some other great house in the next county and that she had left early on the morning after we had seen her at our view, as we called it. Charley verified the adage about little pitchers, I am sure, for she heard of more sayings and doings in a day than would have come to my ears in a month.

We were to stay a month at Mr. Boythorn’s. My pet had scarcely been there a bright week, as I recollect the time, when one evening after we had finished helping the gardener in watering his flowers, and just as the candles were lighted, Charley, appearing with a very important air behind Ada’s chair, beckoned me mysteriously out of the room.

“Oh! If you please, miss,” said Charley in a whisper, with her eyes at their roundest and largest. “You’re wanted at the Dedlock Arms.”

“Why, Charley,” said I, “who can possibly want me at the public-house?”

“I don’t know, miss,” returned Charley, putting her head forward and folding her hands tight upon the band of her little apron, which she always did in the enjoyment of anything mysterious or confidential, “but it’s a gentleman, miss, and his compliments, and will you please to come without saying anything about it.”

“Whose compliments, Charley?”

“His’n, miss,” returned Charley, whose grammatical education was advancing, but not very rapidly.

“And how do you come to be the messenger, Charley?”

“I am not the messenger, if you please, miss,” returned my little maid. “It was W. Grubble, miss.”

“And who is W. Grubble, Charley?”

“Mister Grubble, miss,” returned Charley. “Don’t you know, miss? The Dedlock Arms, by W. Grubble,” which Charley delivered as if she were slowly spelling out the sign.

“Aye? The landlord, Charley?”

“Yes, miss. If you please, miss, his wife is a beautiful woman, but she broke her ankle, and it never joined. And her brother’s the sawyer that was put in the cage, miss, and they expect he’ll drink himself to death entirely on beer,” said Charley.

Not knowing what might be the matter, and being easily apprehensive now, I thought it best to go to this place by myself. I bade Charley be quick with my bonnet and veil and my shawl, and having put them on, went away down the little hilly street, where I was as much at home as in Mr. Boythorn’s garden.

Mr. Grubble was standing in his shirt-sleeves at the door of his very clean little tavern waiting for me. He lifted off his hat with both hands when he saw me coming, and carrying it so, as if it were an iron vessel (it looked as heavy), preceded me along the sanded passage to his best parlour, a neat carpeted room with more plants in it than were quite convenient, a coloured print of Queen Caroline, several shells, a good many tea-trays, two stuffed and dried fish in glass cases, and either a curious egg or a curious pumpkin

(but I don’t know which, and I doubt if many people did) hanging from his ceiling. I knew Mr. Grubble very well by sight, from his often standing at his door. A pleasant-looking, stoutish, middle-aged man who never seemed to consider himself cozily dressed for his own fire-side without his hat and top-boots, but who never wore a coat except at church.

He snuffed the candle, and backing away a little to see how it looked, backed out of the room—unexpectedly to me, for I was going to ask him by whom he had been sent. The door of the opposite parlour being then opened, I heard some voices, familiar in my ears I thought, which stopped. A quick light step approached the room in which I was, and who should stand before me but Richard!

“My dear Esther!” he said. “My best friend!” And he really was so warm-hearted and earnest that in the first surprise and pleasure of his brotherly greeting I could scarcely find breath to tell him that Ada was well.

“Answering my very thoughts—always the same dear girl!” said Richard, leading me to a chair and seating himself beside me.

I put my veil up, but not quite.

“Always the same dear girl!” said Richard just as heartily as before.

I put up my veil altogether, and laying my hand on Richard’s sleeve and looking in his face, told him how much I thanked him for his kind welcome and how greatly I rejoiced to see him, the more so because of the determination I had made in my illness, which I now conveyed to him.

“My love,” said Richard, “there is no one with whom I have a greater wish to talk than you, for I want you to understand me.”

“And I want you, Richard,” said I, shaking my head, “to understand some one else.”

“Since you refer so immediately to John Jarndyce,” said Richard, “—I suppose you mean him?”

“Of course I do.”

“Then I may say at once that I am glad of it, because it is on that subject that I am anxious to be understood. By you, mind—you, my dear! I am not accountable to Mr. Jarndyce or Mr. Anybody.”

I was pained to find him taking this tone, and he observed it.

“Well, well, my dear,” said Richard, “we won’t go into that now. I want to appear quietly in your country-house here, with you under my arm, and give my charming cousin a surprise. I suppose your loyalty to John

Jarndyce will allow that?”

“My dear Richard,” I returned, “you know you would be heartily welcome at his house—your home, if you will but consider it so; and you are as heartily welcome here!”

“Spoken like the best of little women!” cried Richard gaily.

I asked him how he liked his profession.

“Oh, I like it well enough!” said Richard. “It’s all right. It does as well as anything else, for a time. I don’t know that I shall care about it when I come to be settled, but I can sell out then and—however, never mind all that botheration at present.”

So young and handsome, and in all respects so perfectly the opposite of Miss Flite! And yet, in the clouded, eager, seeking look that passed over him, so dreadfully like her!

“I am in town on leave just now,” said Richard.

“Indeed?”

“Yes. I have run over to look after my—my Chancery interests before the long vacation,” said Richard, forcing a careless laugh. “We are beginning to spin along with that old suit at last, I promise you.”

No wonder that I shook my head!

“As you say, it’s not a pleasant subject.” Richard spoke with the same shade crossing his face as before. “Let it go to the four winds for to-night. Puff! Gone! Who do you suppose is with me?”

“Was it Mr. Skimpole’s voice I heard?”

“That’s the man! He does me more good than anybody. What a fascinating child it is!”

I asked Richard if any one knew of their coming down together. He answered, no, nobody. He had been to call upon the dear old infant—so he called Mr. Skimpole—and the dear old infant had told him where we were, and he had told the dear old infant he was bent on coming to see us, and the dear old infant had directly wanted to come too; and so he had brought him. “And he is worth—not to say his sordid expenses—but thrice his weight in gold,” said Richard. “He is such a cheery fellow. No worldliness about him. Fresh and green-hearted!”

I certainly did not see the proof of Mr. Skimpole’s worldliness in his having his expenses paid by Richard, but I made no remark about that. Indeed, he came in and turned our conversation. He was charmed to see me,

said he had been shedding delicious tears of joy and sympathy at intervals for six weeks on my account, had never been so happy as in hearing of my progress, began to understand the mixture of good and evil in the world now, felt that he appreciated health the more when somebody else was ill, didn't know but what it might be in the scheme of things that A should squint to make B happier in looking straight or that C should carry a wooden leg to make D better satisfied with his flesh and blood in a silk stocking.

"My dear Miss Summerson, here is our friend Richard," said Mr. Skimpole, "full of the brightest visions of the future, which he evokes out of the darkness of Chancery. Now that's delightful, that's inspiriting, that's full of poetry! In old times the woods and solitudes were made joyous to the shepherd by the imaginary piping and dancing of Pan and the nymphs. This present shepherd, our pastoral Richard, brightens the dull Inns of Court by making Fortune and her train sport through them to the melodious notes of a judgment from the bench. That's very pleasant, you know! Some ill-conditioned growling fellow may say to me, 'What's the use of these legal and equitable abuses? How do you defend them?' I reply, 'My growling friend, I DON'T defend them, but they are very agreeable to me. There is a shepherd—youth, a friend of mine, who transmutes them into something highly fascinating to my simplicity. I don't say it is for this that they exist—for I am a child among you worldly grumblers, and not called upon to account to you or myself for anything—but it may be so.'"

I began seriously to think that Richard could scarcely have found a worse friend than this. It made me uneasy that at such a time when he most required some right principle and purpose he should have this captivating looseness and putting-off of everything, this airy dispensing with all principle and purpose, at his elbow. I thought I could understand how such a nature as my guardian's, experienced in the world and forced to contemplate the miserable evasions and contentions of the family misfortune, found an immense relief in Mr. Skimpole's avowal of his weaknesses and display of guileless candour; but I could not satisfy myself that it was as artless as it seemed or that it did not serve Mr. Skimpole's idle turn quite as well as any other part, and with less trouble.

They both walked back with me, and Mr. Skimpole leaving us at the gate, I walked softly in with Richard and said, "Ada, my love, I have

brought a gentleman to visit you.” It was not difficult to read the blushing, startled face. She loved him dearly, and he knew it, and I knew it. It was a very transparent business, that meeting as cousins only.

I almost mistrusted myself as growing quite wicked in my suspicions, but I was not so sure that Richard loved her dearly. He admired her very much—any one must have done that—and I dare say would have renewed their youthful engagement with great pride and ardour but that he knew how she would respect her promise to my guardian. Still I had a tormenting idea that the influence upon him extended even here, that he was postponing his best truth and earnestness in this as in all things until Jarndyce and Jarndyce should be off his mind. Ah me! What Richard would have been without that blight, I never shall know now!

He told Ada, in his most ingenuous way, that he had not come to make any secret inroad on the terms she had accepted (rather too implicitly and confidingly, he thought) from Mr. Jarndyce, that he had come openly to see her and to see me and to justify himself for the present terms on which he stood with Mr. Jarndyce. As the dear old infant would be with us directly, he begged that I would make an appointment for the morning, when he might set himself right through the means of an unreserved conversation with me. I proposed to walk with him in the park at seven o’clock, and this was arranged. Mr. Skimpole soon afterwards appeared and made us merry for an hour. He particularly requested to see little Coavinses (meaning Charley) and told her, with a patriarchal air, that he had given her late father all the business in his power and that if one of her little brothers would make haste to get set up in the same profession, he hoped he should still be able to put a good deal of employment in his way.

“For I am constantly being taken in these nets,” said Mr. Skimpole, looking beamingly at us over a glass of wine-and-water, “and am constantly being bailed out—like a boat. Or paid off—like a ship’s company. Somebody always does it for me. I can’t do it, you know, for I never have any money. But somebody does it. I get out by somebody’s means; I am not like the starling; I get out. If you were to ask me who somebody is, upon my word I couldn’t tell you. Let us drink to somebody. God bless him!”

Richard was a little late in the morning, but I had not to wait for him long, and we turned into the park. The air was bright and dewy and the sky without a cloud. The birds sang delightfully; the sparkles in the fern, the

grass, and trees, were exquisite to see; the richness of the woods seemed to have increased twenty-fold since yesterday, as if, in the still night when they had looked so massively hushed in sleep, Nature, through all the minute details of every wonderful leaf, had been more wakeful than usual for the glory of that day.

"This is a lovely place," said Richard, looking round. "None of the jar and discord of law-suits here!"

But there was other trouble.

"I tell you what, my dear girl," said Richard, "when I get affairs in general settled, I shall come down here, I think, and rest."

"Would it not be better to rest now?" I asked.

"Oh, as to resting NOW," said Richard, "or as to doing anything very definite NOW, that's not easy. In short, it can't be done; I can't do it at least."

"Why not?" said I.

"You know why not, Esther. If you were living in an unfinished house, liable to have the roof put on or taken off—to be from top to bottom pulled down or built up—to-morrow, next day, next week, next month, next year—you would find it hard to rest or settle. So do I. Now? There's no now for us suitors."

I could almost have believed in the attraction on which my poor little wandering friend had expatiated when I saw again the darkened look of last night. Terrible to think it had in it also a shade of that unfortunate man who had died.

"My dear Richard," said I, "this is a bad beginning of our conversation."

"I knew you would tell me so, Dame Durden."

"And not I alone, dear Richard. It was not I who cautioned you once never to found a hope or expectation on the family curse."

"There you come back to John Jarndyce!" said Richard impatiently. "Well! We must approach him sooner or later, for he is the staple of what I have to say, and it's as well at once. My dear Esther, how can you be so blind? Don't you see that he is an interested party and that it may be very well for him to wish me to know nothing of the suit, and care nothing about it, but that it may not be quite so well for me?"

"Oh, Richard," I remonstrated, "is it possible that you can ever have seen him and heard him, that you can ever have lived under his roof and known

him, and can yet breathe, even to me in this solitary place where there is no one to hear us, such unworthy suspicions?”

He reddened deeply, as if his natural generosity felt a pang of reproach. He was silent for a little while before he replied in a subdued voice, “Esther, I am sure you know that I am not a mean fellow and that I have some sense of suspicion and distrust being poor qualities in one of my years.”

“I know it very well,” said I. “I am not more sure of anything.”

“That’s a dear girl,” retorted Richard, “and like you, because it gives me comfort. I had need to get some scrap of comfort out of all this business, for it’s a bad one at the best, as I have no occasion to tell you.”

“I know perfectly,” said I. “I know as well, Richard—what shall I say? as well as you do—that such misconstructions are foreign to your nature. And I know, as well as you know, what so changes it.”

“Come, sister, come,” said Richard a little more gaily, “you will be fair with me at all events. If I have the misfortune to be under that influence, so has he. If it has a little twisted me, it may have a little twisted him too. I don’t say that he is not an honourable man, out of all this complication and uncertainty; I am sure he is. But it taints everybody. You know it taints everybody. You have heard him say so fifty times. Then why should HE escape?”

“Because,” said I, “his is an uncommon character, and he has resolutely kept himself outside the circle, Richard.”

“Oh, because and because!” replied Richard in his vivacious way. “I am not sure, my dear girl, but that it may be wise and specious to preserve that outward indifference. It may cause other parties interested to become lax about their interests; and people may die off, and points may drag themselves out of memory, and many things may smoothly happen that are convenient enough.”

I was so touched with pity for Richard that I could not reproach him any more, even by a look. I remembered my guardian’s gentleness towards his errors and with what perfect freedom from resentment he had spoken of them.

“Esther,” Richard resumed, “you are not to suppose that I have come here to make underhanded charges against John Jarndyce. I have only come to justify myself. What I say is, it was all very well and we got on very well while I was a boy, utterly regardless of this same suit; but as soon as I began

to take an interest in it and to look into it, then it was quite another thing. Then John Jarndyce discovers that Ada and I must break off and that if I don't amend that very objectionable course, I am not fit for her. Now, Esther, I don't mean to amend that very objectionable course: I will not hold John Jarndyce's favour on those unfair terms of compromise, which he has no right to dictate. Whether it pleases him or displeases him, I must maintain my rights and Ada's. I have been thinking about it a good deal, and this is the conclusion I have come to."

Poor dear Richard! He had indeed been thinking about it a good deal. His face, his voice, his manner, all showed that too plainly.

"So I tell him honourably (you are to know I have written to him about all this) that we are at issue and that we had better be at issue openly than covertly. I thank him for his goodwill and his protection, and he goes his road, and I go mine. The fact is, our roads are not the same. Under one of the wills in dispute, I should take much more than he. I don't mean to say that it is the one to be established, but there it is, and it has its chance."

"I have not to learn from you, my dear Richard," said I, "of your letter. I had heard of it already without an offended or angry word."

"Indeed?" replied Richard, softening. "I am glad I said he was an honourable man, out of all this wretched affair. But I always say that and have never doubted it. Now, my dear Esther, I know these views of mine appear extremely harsh to you, and will to Ada when you tell her what has passed between us. But if you had gone into the case as I have, if you had only applied yourself to the papers as I did when I was at Kenge's, if you only knew what an accumulation of charges and counter-charges, and suspicions and cross-suspicions, they involve, you would think me moderate in comparison."

"Perhaps so," said I. "But do you think that, among those many papers, there is much truth and justice, Richard?"

"There is truth and justice somewhere in the case, Esther—"

"Or was once, long ago," said I.

"Is—is—must be somewhere," pursued Richard impetuously, "and must be brought out. To allow Ada to be made a bribe and hush-money of is not the way to bring it out. You say the suit is changing me; John Jarndyce says it changes, has changed, and will change everybody who has any share in it. Then the greater right I have on my side when I resolve to do all I can to

bring it to an end.”

“All you can, Richard! Do you think that in these many years no others have done all they could? Has the difficulty grown easier because of so many failures?”

“It can’t last for ever,” returned Richard with a fierceness kindling in him which again presented to me that last sad reminder. “I am young and earnest, and energy and determination have done wonders many a time. Others have only half thrown themselves into it. I devote myself to it. I make it the object of my life.”

“Oh, Richard, my dear, so much the worse, so much the worse!”

“No, no, no, don’t you be afraid for me,” he returned affectionately. “You’re a dear, good, wise, quiet, blessed girl; but you have your prepossessions. So I come round to John Jarndyce. I tell you, my good Esther, when he and I were on those terms which he found so convenient, we were not on natural terms.”

“Are division and animosity your natural terms, Richard?”

“No, I don’t say that. I mean that all this business puts us on unnatural terms, with which natural relations are incompatible. See another reason for urging it on! I may find out when it’s over that I have been mistaken in John Jarndyce. My head may be clearer when I am free of it, and I may then agree with what you say to-day. Very well. Then I shall acknowledge it and make him reparation.”

Everything postponed to that imaginary time! Everything held in confusion and indecision until then!

“Now, my best of confidantes,” said Richard, “I want my cousin Ada to understand that I am not captious, fickle, and wilful about John Jarndyce, but that I have this purpose and reason at my back. I wish to represent myself to her through you, because she has a great esteem and respect for her cousin John; and I know you will soften the course I take, even though you disapprove of it; and—and in short,” said Richard, who had been hesitating through these words, “I—I don’t like to represent myself in this litigious, contentious, doubting character to a confiding girl like Ada.”

I told him that he was more like himself in those latter words than in anything he had said yet.

“Why,” acknowledged Richard, “that may be true enough, my love. I rather feel it to be so. But I shall be able to give myself fair-play by and by.

I shall come all right again, then, don’t you be afraid.”

I asked him if this were all he wished me to tell Ada.

“Not quite,” said Richard. “I am bound not to withhold from her that John Jarndyce answered my letter in his usual manner, addressing me as ‘My dear Rick,’ trying to argue me out of my opinions, and telling me that they should make no difference in him. (All very well of course, but not altering the case.) I also want Ada to know that if I see her seldom just now, I am looking after her interests as well as my own—we two being in the same boat exactly—and that I hope she will not suppose from any flying rumours she may hear that I am at all light-headed or imprudent; on the contrary, I am always looking forward to the termination of the suit, and always planning in that direction. Being of age now and having taken the step I have taken, I consider myself free from any accountability to John Jarndyce; but Ada being still a ward of the court, I don’t yet ask her to renew our engagement. When she is free to act for herself, I shall be myself once more and we shall both be in very different worldly circumstances, I believe. If you tell her all this with the advantage of your considerate way, you will do me a very great and a very kind service, my dear Esther; and I shall knock Jarndyce and Jarndyce on the head with greater vigour. Of course I ask for no secrecy at Bleak House.”

“Richard,” said I, “you place great confidence in me, but I fear you will not take advice from me?”

“It’s impossible that I can on this subject, my dear girl. On any other, readily.”

As if there were any other in his life! As if his whole career and character were not being dyed one colour!

“But I may ask you a question, Richard?”

“I think so,” said he, laughing. “I don’t know who may not, if you may not.”

“You say, yourself, you are not leading a very settled life.”

“How can I, my dear Esther, with nothing settled!”

“Are you in debt again?”

“Why, of course I am,” said Richard, astonished at my simplicity.

“Is it of course?”

“My dear child, certainly. I can’t throw myself into an object so completely without expense. You forget, or perhaps you don’t know, that

under either of the wills Ada and I take something. It's only a question between the larger sum and the smaller. I shall be within the mark any way. Bless your heart, my excellent girl," said Richard, quite amused with me, "I shall be all right! I shall pull through, my dear!"

I felt so deeply sensible of the danger in which he stood that I tried, in Ada's name, in my guardian's, in my own, by every fervent means that I could think of, to warn him of it and to show him some of his mistakes. He received everything I said with patience and gentleness, but it all rebounded from him without taking the least effect. I could not wonder at this after the reception his preoccupied mind had given to my guardian's letter, but I determined to try Ada's influence yet.

So when our walk brought us round to the village again, and I went home to breakfast, I prepared Ada for the account I was going to give her and told her exactly what reason we had to dread that Richard was losing himself and scattering his whole life to the winds. It made her very unhappy, of course, though she had a far, far greater reliance on his correcting his errors than I could have—which was so natural and loving in my dear!—and she presently wrote him this little letter:

> My dearest cousin,
>
> Esther has told me all you said to her this morning. I write this to repeat most earnestly for myself all that she said to you and to let you know how sure I am that you will sooner or later find our cousin John a pattern of truth, sincerity, and goodness, when you will deeply, deeply grieve to have done him (without intending it) so much wrong.
>
> I do not quite know how to write what I wish to say next, but I trust you will understand it as I mean it. I have some fears, my dearest cousin, that it may be partly for my sake you are now laying up so much unhappiness for yourself—and if for yourself, for me. In case this should be so, or in case you should entertain much thought of me in what you are doing, I most earnestly entreat and beg you to desist. You can do nothing for my sake that will make me half so happy as for ever turning your back upon the shadow in which we both were born. Do not be angry with me for saying this. Pray, pray, dear Richard, for my sake, and for your own, and in a natural repugnance for that source

of trouble which had its share in making us both orphans when we were very young, pray, pray, let it go for ever. We have reason to know by this time that there is no good in it and no hope, that there is nothing to be got from it but sorrow.

My dearest cousin, it is needless for me to say that you are quite free and that it is very likely you may find some one whom you will love much better than your first fancy. I am quite sure, if you will let me say so, that the object of your choice would greatly prefer to follow your fortunes far and wide, however moderate or poor, and see you happy, doing your duty and pursuing your chosen way, than to have the hope of being, or even to be, very rich with you (if such a thing were possible) at the cost of dragging years of procrastination and anxiety and of your indifference to other aims. You may wonder at my saying this so confidently with so little knowledge or experience, but I know it for a certainty from my own heart.

Ever, my dearest cousin, your most affectionate

Ada

This note brought Richard to us very soon, but it made little change in him if any. We would fairly try, he said, who was right and who was wrong—he would show us—we should see! He was animated and glowing, as if Ada's tenderness had gratified him; but I could only hope, with a sigh, that the letter might have some stronger effect upon his mind on re-perusal than it assuredly had then.

As they were to remain with us that day and had taken their places to return by the coach next morning, I sought an opportunity of speaking to Mr. Skimpole. Our out-of-door life easily threw one in my way, and I delicately said that there was a responsibility in encouraging Richard.

"Responsibility, my dear Miss Summerson?" he repeated, catching at the word with the pleasantest smile. "I am the last man in the world for such a thing. I never was responsible in my life—I can't be."

"I am afraid everybody is obliged to be," said I timidly enough, he being so much older and more clever than I.

"No, really?" said Mr. Skimpole, receiving this new light with a most agreeable jocularity of surprise. "But every man's not obliged to be solvent?

I am not. I never was. See, my dear Miss Summerson," he took a handful of loose silver and halfpence from his pocket, "there's so much money. I have not an idea how much. I have not the power of counting. Call it four and ninepence—call it four pound nine. They tell me I owe more than that. I dare say I do. I dare say I owe as much as good-natured people will let me owe. If they don't stop, why should I? There you have Harold Skimpole in little. If that's responsibility, I am responsible."

The perfect ease of manner with which he put the money up again and looked at me with a smile on his refined face, as if he had been mentioning a curious little fact about somebody else, almost made me feel as if he really had nothing to do with it.

"Now, when you mention responsibility," he resumed, "I am disposed to say that I never had the happiness of knowing any one whom I should consider so refreshingly responsible as yourself. You appear to me to be the very touchstone of responsibility. When I see you, my dear Miss Summerson, intent upon the perfect working of the whole little orderly system of which you are the centre, I feel inclined to say to myself—in fact I do say to myself very often—THAT'S responsibility!"

It was difficult, after this, to explain what I meant; but I persisted so far as to say that we all hoped he would check and not confirm Richard in the sanguine views he entertained just then.

"Most willingly," he retorted, "if I could. But, my dear Miss Summerson, I have no art, no disguise. If he takes me by the hand and leads me through Westminster Hall in an airy procession after fortune, I must go. If he says, 'Skimpole, join the dance!' I must join it. Common sense wouldn't, I know, but I have NO common sense."

It was very unfortunate for Richard, I said.

"Do you think so!" returned Mr. Skimpole. "Don't say that, don't say that. Let us suppose him keeping company with Common Sense—an excellent man—a good deal wrinkled—dreadfully practical—change for a ten-pound note in every pocket—ruled account-book in his hand—say, upon the whole, resembling a tax-gatherer. Our dear Richard, sanguine, ardent, overleaping obstacles, bursting with poetry like a young bud, says to this highly respectable companion, 'I see a golden prospect before me; it's very bright, it's very beautiful, it's very joyous; here I go, bounding over the landscape to come at it!' The respectable companion instantly knocks him

down with the ruled account-book; tells him in a literal, prosaic way that he sees no such thing; shows him it's nothing but fees, fraud, horsehair wigs, and black gowns. Now you know that's a painful change—sensible in the last degree, I have no doubt, but disagreeable. I can't do it. I haven't got the ruled account-book, I have none of the tax-gathering elements in my composition, I am not at all respectable, and I don't want to be. Odd perhaps, but so it is!"

It was idle to say more, so I proposed that we should join Ada and Richard, who were a little in advance, and I gave up Mr. Skimpole in despair. He had been over the Hall in the course of the morning and whimsically described the family pictures as we walked. There were such portentous shepherdesses among the Ladies Dedlock dead and gone, he told us, that peaceful crooks became weapons of assault in their hands. They tended their flocks severely in buckram and powder and put their sticking-plaster patches on to terrify commoners as the chiefs of some other tribes put on their war-paint. There was a Sir Somebody Dedlock, with a battle, a sprung-mine, volumes of smoke, flashes of lightning, a town on fire, and a stormed fort, all in full action between his horse's two hind legs, showing, he supposed, how little a Dedlock made of such trifles. The whole race he represented as having evidently been, in life, what he called "stuffed people"—a large collection, glassy eyed, set up in the most approved manner on their various twigs and perches, very correct, perfectly free from animation, and always in glass cases.

I was not so easy now during any reference to the name but that I felt it a relief when Richard, with an exclamation of surprise, hurried away to meet a stranger whom he first descried coming slowly towards us.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Skimpole. "Vholes!"

We asked if that were a friend of Richard's.

"Friend and legal adviser," said Mr. Skimpole. "Now, my dear Miss Summerson, if you want common sense, responsibility, and respectability, all united—if you want an exemplary man—Vholes is THE man."

We had not known, we said, that Richard was assisted by any gentleman of that name.

"When he emerged from legal infancy," returned Mr. Skimpole, "he parted from our conversational friend Kenge and took up, I believe, with Vholes. Indeed, I know he did, because I introduced him to Vholes."

“Had you known him long?” asked Ada.

“Vholes? My dear Miss Clare, I had had that kind of acquaintance with him which I have had with several gentlemen of his profession. He had done something or other in a very agreeable, civil manner—taken proceedings, I think, is the expression—which ended in the proceeding of his taking ME. Somebody was so good as to step in and pay the money—something and fourpence was the amount; I forget the pounds and shillings, but I know it ended with fourpence, because it struck me at the time as being so odd that I could owe anybody fourpence—and after that I brought them together. Vholes asked me for the introduction, and I gave it. Now I come to think of it,” he looked inquiringly at us with his frankest smile as he made the discovery, “Vholes bribed me, perhaps? He gave me something and called it commission. Was it a five-pound note? Do you know, I think it MUST have been a five-pound note!”

His further consideration of the point was prevented by Richard’s coming back to us in an excited state and hastily representing Mr. Vholes—a sallow man with pinched lips that looked as if they were cold, a red eruption here and there upon his face, tall and thin, about fifty years of age, high-shouldered, and stooping. Dressed in black, black-gloved, and buttoned to the chin, there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner and a slow, fixed way he had of looking at Richard.

“I hope I don’t disturb you, ladies,” said Mr. Vholes, and now I observed that he was further remarkable for an inward manner of speaking. “I arranged with Mr. Carstone that he should always know when his cause was in the Chancellor’s paper, and being informed by one of my clerks last night after post time that it stood, rather unexpectedly, in the paper for to-morrow, I put myself into the coach early this morning and came down to confer with him.”

“Yes,” said Richard, flushed, and looking triumphantly at Ada and me, “we don’t do these things in the old slow way now. We spin along now! Mr. Vholes, we must hire something to get over to the post town in, and catch the mail to-night, and go up by it!”

“Anything you please, sir,” returned Mr. Vholes. “I am quite at your service.”

“Let me see,” said Richard, looking at his watch. “If I run down to the Dedlock, and get my portmanteau fastened up, and order a gig, or a chaise,

or whatever's to be got, we shall have an hour then before starting. I'll come back to tea. Cousin Ada, will you and Esther take care of Mr. Vholes when I am gone?"

He was away directly, in his heat and hurry, and was soon lost in the dusk of evening. We who were left walked on towards the house.

"Is Mr. Carstone's presence necessary to-morrow, Sir?" said I. "Can it do any good?"

"No, miss," Mr. Vholes replied. "I am not aware that it can."

Both Ada and I expressed our regret that he should go, then, only to be disappointed.

"Mr. Carstone has laid down the principle of watching his own interests," said Mr. Vholes, "and when a client lays down his own principle, and it is not immoral, it devolves upon me to carry it out. I wish in business to be exact and open. I am a widower with three daughters—Emma, Jane, and Caroline—and my desire is so to discharge the duties of life as to leave them a good name. This appears to be a pleasant spot, miss."

The remark being made to me in consequence of my being next him as we walked, I assented and enumerated its chief attractions.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Vholes. "I have the privilege of supporting an aged father in the Vale of Taunton—his native place—and I admire that country very much. I had no idea there was anything so attractive here."

To keep up the conversation, I asked Mr. Vholes if he would like to live altogether in the country.

"There, miss," said he, "you touch me on a tender string. My health is not good (my digestion being much impaired), and if I had only myself to consider, I should take refuge in rural habits, especially as the cares of business have prevented me from ever coming much into contact with general society, and particularly with ladies' society, which I have most wished to mix in. But with my three daughters, Emma, Jane, and Caroline —and my aged father—I cannot afford to be selfish. It is true I have no longer to maintain a dear grandmother who died in her hundred and second year, but enough remains to render it indispensable that the mill should be always going."

It required some attention to hear him on account of his inward speaking and his lifeless manner.

"You will excuse my having mentioned my daughters," he said. "They

are my weak point. I wish to leave the poor girls some little independence, as well as a good name."

We now arrived at Mr. Boythorn's house, where the tea-table, all prepared, was awaiting us. Richard came in restless and hurried shortly afterwards, and leaning over Mr. Vholes's chair, whispered something in his ear. Mr. Vholes replied aloud—or as nearly aloud I suppose as he had ever replied to anything—"You will drive me, will you, sir? It is all the same to me, sir. Anything you please. I am quite at your service."

We understood from what followed that Mr. Skimpole was to be left until the morning to occupy the two places which had been already paid for. As Ada and I were both in low spirits concerning Richard and very sorry so to part with him, we made it as plain as we politely could that we should leave Mr. Skimpole to the Dedlock Arms and retire when the night-travellers were gone.

Richard's high spirits carrying everything before them, we all went out together to the top of the hill above the village, where he had ordered a gig to wait and where we found a man with a lantern standing at the head of the gaunt pale horse that had been harnessed to it.

I never shall forget those two seated side by side in the lantern's light, Richard all flush and fire and laughter, with the reins in his hand; Mr. Vholes quite still, black-gloved, and buttoned up, looking at him as if he were looking at his prey and charming it. I have before me the whole picture of the warm dark night, the summer lightning, the dusty track of road closed in by hedgerows and high trees, the gaunt pale horse with his ears pricked up, and the driving away at speed to Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

My dear girl told me that night how Richard's being thereafter prosperous or ruined, befriended or deserted, could only make this difference to her, that the more he needed love from one unchanging heart, the more love that unchanging heart would have to give him; how he thought of her through his present errors, and she would think of him at all times—never of herself if she could devote herself to him, never of her own delights if she could minister to his.

And she kept her word?

I look along the road before me, where the distance already shortens and the journey's end is growing visible; and true and good above the dead sea of the Chancery suit and all the ashy fruit it cast ashore, I think I see my

darling.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A Struggle

WHEN OUR TIME CAME for returning to Bleak House again, we were punctual to the day and were received with an overpowering welcome. I was perfectly restored to health and strength, and finding my housekeeping keys laid ready for me in my room, rang myself in as if I had been a new year, with a merry little peal. “Once more, duty, duty, Esther,” said I; “and if you are not overjoyed to do it, more than cheerfully and contentedly, through anything and everything, you ought to be. That’s all I have to say to you, my dear!”

The first few mornings were mornings of so much bustle and business, devoted to such settlements of accounts, such repeated journeys to and fro between the growlery and all other parts of the house, so many rearrangements of drawers and presses, and such a general new beginning altogether, that I had not a moment’s leisure. But when these arrangements were completed and everything was in order, I paid a visit of a few hours to London, which something in the letter I had destroyed at Chesney Wold had induced me to decide upon in my own mind.

I made Caddy Jellyby—her maiden name was so natural to me that I always called her by it—the pretext for this visit and wrote her a note previously asking the favour of her company on a little business expedition. Leaving home very early in the morning, I got to London by stage-coach in such good time that I got to Newman Street with the day before me.

Caddy, who had not seen me since her wedding-day, was so glad and so affectionate that I was half inclined to fear I should make her husband jealous. But he was, in his way, just as bad—I mean as good; and in short it was the old story, and nobody would leave me any possibility of doing anything meritorious.

The elder Mr. Turveydrop was in bed, I found, and Caddy was milling his chocolate, which a melancholy little boy who was an apprentice—it seemed such a curious thing to be apprenticed to the trade of dancing—was

waiting to carry upstairs. Her father-in-law was extremely kind and considerate, Caddy told me, and they lived most happily together. (When she spoke of their living together, she meant that the old gentleman had all the good things and all the good lodging, while she and her husband had what they could get, and were poked into two corner rooms over the Mews.)

"And how is your mama, Caddy?" said I.

"Why, I hear of her, Esther," replied Caddy, "through Pa, but I see very little of her. We are good friends, I am glad to say, but Ma thinks there is something absurd in my having married a dancing-master, and she is rather afraid of its extending to her."

It struck me that if Mrs. Jellyby had discharged her own natural duties and obligations before she swept the horizon with a telescope in search of others, she would have taken the best precautions against becoming absurd, but I need scarcely observe that I kept this to myself.

"And your papa, Caddy?"

"He comes here every evening," returned Caddy, "and is so fond of sitting in the corner there that it's a treat to see him."

Looking at the corner, I plainly perceived the mark of Mr. Jellyby's head against the wall. It was consolatory to know that he had found such a resting-place for it.

"And you, Caddy," said I, "you are always busy, I'll be bound?"

"Well, my dear," returned Caddy, "I am indeed, for to tell you a grand secret, I am qualifying myself to give lessons. Prince's health is not strong, and I want to be able to assist him. What with schools, and classes here, and private pupils, AND the apprentices, he really has too much to do, poor fellow!"

The notion of the apprentices was still so odd to me that I asked Caddy if there were many of them.

"Four," said Caddy. "One in-door, and three out. They are very good children; only when they get together they WILL play—children-like—instead of attending to their work. So the little boy you saw just now waltzes by himself in the empty kitchen, and we distribute the others over the house as well as we can."

"That is only for their steps, of course?" said I.

"Only for their steps," said Caddy. "In that way they practise, so many

hours at a time, whatever steps they happen to be upon. They dance in the academy, and at this time of year we do figures at five every morning."

"Why, what a laborious life!" I exclaimed.

"I assure you, my dear," returned Caddy, smiling, "when the out-door apprentices ring us up in the morning (the bell rings into our room, not to disturb old Mr. Turveydrop), and when I put up the window and see them standing on the door-step with their little pumps under their arms, I am actually reminded of the Sweeps."

All this presented the art to me in a singular light, to be sure. Caddy enjoyed the effect of her communication and cheerfully recounted the particulars of her own studies.

"You see, my dear, to save expense I ought to know something of the piano, and I ought to know something of the kit too, and consequently I have to practise those two instruments as well as the details of our profession. If Ma had been like anybody else, I might have had some little musical knowledge to begin upon. However, I hadn't any; and that part of the work is, at first, a little discouraging, I must allow. But I have a very good ear, and I am used to drudgery—I have to thank Ma for that, at all events—and where there's a will there's a way, you know, Esther, the world over." Saying these words, Caddy laughingly sat down at a little jingling square piano and really rattled off a quadrille with great spirit. Then she good-humouredly and blushingly got up again, and while she still laughed herself, said, "Don't laugh at me, please; that's a dear girl!"

I would sooner have cried, but I did neither. I encouraged her and praised her with all my heart. For I conscientiously believed, dancing-master's wife though she was, and dancing-mistress though in her limited ambition she aspired to be, she had struck out a natural, wholesome, loving course of industry and perseverance that was quite as good as a mission.

"My dear," said Caddy, delighted, "you can't think how you cheer me. I shall owe you, you don't know how much. What changes, Esther, even in my small world! You recollect that first night, when I was so unpolite and inky? Who would have thought, then, of my ever teaching people to dance, of all other possibilities and impossibilities!"

Her husband, who had left us while we had this chat, now coming back, preparatory to exercising the apprentices in the ball-room, Caddy informed me she was quite at my disposal. But it was not my time yet, I was glad to

tell her, for I should have been vexed to take her away then. Therefore we three adjourned to the apprentices together, and I made one in the dance.

The apprentices were the queerest little people. Besides the melancholy boy, who, I hoped, had not been made so by waltzing alone in the empty kitchen, there were two other boys and one dirty little limp girl in a gauzy dress. Such a precocious little girl, with such a dowdy bonnet on (that, too, of a gauzy texture), who brought her sandalled shoes in an old threadbare velvet reticule. Such mean little boys, when they were not dancing, with string, and marbles, and cramp-bones in their pockets, and the most untidy legs and feet—and heels particularly.

I asked Caddy what had made their parents choose this profession for them. Caddy said she didn't know; perhaps they were designed for teachers, perhaps for the stage. They were all people in humble circumstances, and the melancholy boy's mother kept a ginger-beer shop.

We danced for an hour with great gravity, the melancholy child doing wonders with his lower extremities, in which there appeared to be some sense of enjoyment though it never rose above his waist. Caddy, while she was observant of her husband and was evidently founded upon him, had acquired a grace and self-possession of her own, which, united to her pretty face and figure, was uncommonly agreeable. She already relieved him of much of the instruction of these young people, and he seldom interfered except to walk his part in the figure if he had anything to do in it. He always played the tune. The affectation of the gauzy child, and her condescension to the boys, was a sight. And thus we danced an hour by the clock.

When the practice was concluded, Caddy's husband made himself ready to go out of town to a school, and Caddy ran away to get ready to go out with me. I sat in the ball-room in the interval, contemplating the apprentices. The two out-door boys went upon the staircase to put on their half-boots and pull the in-door boy's hair, as I judged from the nature of his objections. Returning with their jackets buttoned and their pumps stuck in them, they then produced packets of cold bread and meat and bivouacked under a painted lyre on the wall. The little gauzy child, having whisked her sandals into the reticule and put on a trodden-down pair of shoes, shook her head into the dowdy bonnet at one shake, and answering my inquiry whether she liked dancing by replying, "Not with boys," tied it across her chin, and went home contemptuous.

“Old Mr. Turveydrop is so sorry,” said Caddy, “that he has not finished dressing yet and cannot have the pleasure of seeing you before you go. You are such a favourite of his, Esther.”

I expressed myself much obliged to him, but did not think it necessary to add that I readily dispensed with this attention.

“It takes him a long time to dress,” said Caddy, “because he is very much looked up to in such things, you know, and has a reputation to support. You can’t think how kind he is to Pa. He talks to Pa of an evening about the Prince Regent, and I never saw Pa so interested.”

There was something in the picture of Mr. Turveydrop bestowing his deportment on Mr. Jellyby that quite took my fancy. I asked Caddy if he brought her papa out much.

“No,” said Caddy, “I don’t know that he does that, but he talks to Pa, and Pa greatly admires him, and listens, and likes it. Of course I am aware that Pa has hardly any claims to deportment, but they get on together delightfully. You can’t think what good companions they make. I never saw Pa take snuff before in my life, but he takes one pinch out of Mr. Turveydrop’s box regularly and keeps putting it to his nose and taking it away again all the evening.”

That old Mr. Turveydrop should ever, in the chances and changes of life, have come to the rescue of Mr. Jellyby from Borrioboola-Gha appeared to me to be one of the pleasantest of oddities.

“As to Peepy,” said Caddy with a little hesitation, “whom I was most afraid of—next to having any family of my own, Esther—as an inconvenience to Mr. Turveydrop, the kindness of the old gentleman to that child is beyond everything. He asks to see him, my dear! He lets him take the newspaper up to him in bed; he gives him the crusts of his toast to eat; he sends him on little errands about the house; he tells him to come to me for sixpences. In short,” said Caddy cheerily, “and not to prose, I am a very fortunate girl and ought to be very grateful. Where are we going, Esther?”

“To the Old Street Road,” said I, “where I have a few words to say to the solicitor’s clerk who was sent to meet me at the coach-office on the very day when I came to London and first saw you, my dear. Now I think of it, the gentleman who brought us to your house.”

“Then, indeed, I seem to be naturally the person to go with you,” returned Caddy.

To the Old Street Road we went and there inquired at Mrs. Guppy's residence for Mrs. Guppy. Mrs. Guppy, occupying the parlours and having indeed been visibly in danger of cracking herself like a nut in the front-parlour door by peeping out before she was asked for, immediately presented herself and requested us to walk in. She was an old lady in a large cap, with rather a red nose and rather an unsteady eye, but smiling all over. Her close little sitting-room was prepared for a visit, and there was a portrait of her son in it which, I had almost written here, was more like than life: it insisted upon him with such obstinacy, and was so determined not to let him off.

Not only was the portrait there, but we found the original there too. He was dressed in a great many colours and was discovered at a table reading law-papers with his forefinger to his forehead.

"Miss Summerson," said Mr. Guppy, rising, "this is indeed an oasis. Mother, will you be so good as to put a chair for the other lady and get out of the gangway."

Mrs. Guppy, whose incessant smiling gave her quite a waggish appearance, did as her son requested and then sat down in a corner, holding her pocket handkerchief to her chest, like a fomentation, with both hands.

I presented Caddy, and Mr. Guppy said that any friend of mine was more than welcome. I then proceeded to the object of my visit.

"I took the liberty of sending you a note, sir," said I.

Mr. Guppy acknowledged the receipt by taking it out of his breast-pocket, putting it to his lips, and returning it to his pocket with a bow. Mr. Guppy's mother was so diverted that she rolled her head as she smiled and made a silent appeal to Caddy with her elbow.

"Could I speak to you alone for a moment?" said I.

Anything like the jocoseness of Mr. Guppy's mother just now, I think I never saw. She made no sound of laughter, but she rolled her head, and shook it, and put her handkerchief to her mouth, and appealed to Caddy with her elbow, and her hand, and her shoulder, and was so unspeakably entertained altogether that it was with some difficulty she could marshal Caddy through the little folding-door into her bedroom adjoining.

"Miss Summerson," said Mr. Guppy, "you will excuse the waywardness of a parent ever mindful of a son's appiness. My mother, though highly exasperating to the feelings, is actuated by maternal dictates."

I could hardly have believed that anybody could in a moment have turned so red or changed so much as Mr. Guppy did when I now put up my veil.

"I asked the favour of seeing you for a few moments here," said I, "in preference to calling at Mr. Kenge's because, remembering what you said on an occasion when you spoke to me in confidence, I feared I might otherwise cause you some embarrassment, Mr. Guppy."

I caused him embarrassment enough as it was, I am sure. I never saw such faltering, such confusion, such amazement and apprehension.

"Miss Summerson," stammered Mr. Guppy, "I—I—beg your pardon, but in our profession—we—we—find it necessary to be explicit. You have referred to an occasion, miss, when I—when I did myself the honour of making a declaration which—"

Something seemed to rise in his throat that he could not possibly swallow. He put his hand there, coughed, made faces, tried again to swallow it, coughed again, made faces again, looked all round the room, and fluttered his papers.

"A kind of giddy sensation has come upon me, miss," he explained, "which rather knocks me over. I—er—a little subject to this sort of thing—er—by George!"

I gave him a little time to recover. He consumed it in putting his hand to his forehead and taking it away again, and in backing his chair into the corner behind him.

"My intention was to remark, miss," said Mr. Guppy, "dear me—something bronchial, I think—hem!—to remark that you was so good on that occasion as to repel and repudiate that declaration. You—you wouldn't perhaps object to admit that? Though no witnesses are present, it might be a satisfaction to—to your mind—if you was to put in that admission."

"There can be no doubt," said I, "that I declined your proposal without any reservation or qualification whatever, Mr. Guppy."

"Thank you, miss," he returned, measuring the table with his troubled hands. "So far that's satisfactory, and it does you credit. Er—this is certainly bronchial!—must be in the tubes—er—you wouldn't perhaps be offended if I was to mention—not that it's necessary, for your own good sense or any person's sense must show 'em that—if I was to mention that such declaration on my part was final, and there terminated?"

“I quite understand that,” said I.

“Perhaps—er—it may not be worth the form, but it might be a satisfaction to your mind—perhaps you wouldn’t object to admit that, miss?” said Mr. Guppy.

“I admit it most fully and freely,” said I.

“Thank you,” returned Mr. Guppy. “Very honourable, I am sure. I regret that my arrangements in life, combined with circumstances over which I have no control, will put it out of my power ever to fall back upon that offer or to renew it in any shape or form whatever, but it will ever be a retrospect entwined—er—with friendship’s bowers.” Mr. Guppy’s bronchitis came to his relief and stopped his measurement of the table.

“I may now perhaps mention what I wished to say to you?” I began.

“I shall be honoured, I am sure,” said Mr. Guppy. “I am so persuaded that your own good sense and right feeling, miss, will—will keep you as square as possible—that I can have nothing but pleasure, I am sure, in hearing any observations you may wish to offer.”

“You were so good as to imply, on that occasion—”

“Excuse me, miss,” said Mr. Guppy, “but we had better not travel out of the record into implication. I cannot admit that I implied anything.”

“You said on that occasion,” I recommenced, “that you might possibly have the means of advancing my interests and promoting my fortunes by making discoveries of which I should be the subject. I presume that you founded that belief upon your general knowledge of my being an orphan girl, indebted for everything to the benevolence of Mr. Jarndyce. Now, the beginning and the end of what I have come to beg of you is, Mr. Guppy, that you will have the kindness to relinquish all idea of so serving me. I have thought of this sometimes, and I have thought of it most lately—since I have been ill. At length I have decided, in case you should at any time recall that purpose and act upon it in any way, to come to you and assure you that you are altogether mistaken. You could make no discovery in reference to me that would do me the least service or give me the least pleasure. I am acquainted with my personal history, and I have it in my power to assure you that you never can advance my welfare by such means. You may, perhaps, have abandoned this project a long time. If so, excuse my giving you unnecessary trouble. If not, I entreat you, on the assurance I have given you, henceforth to lay it aside. I beg you to do this, for my

peace."

"I am bound to confess," said Mr. Guppy, "that you express yourself, miss, with that good sense and right feeling for which I gave you credit. Nothing can be more satisfactory than such right feeling, and if I mistook any intentions on your part just now, I am prepared to tender a full apology. I should wish to be understood, miss, as hereby offering that apology—limiting it, as your own good sense and right feeling will point out the necessity of, to the present proceedings."

I must say for Mr. Guppy that the snuffling manner he had had upon him improved very much. He seemed truly glad to be able to do something I asked, and he looked ashamed.

"If you will allow me to finish what I have to say at once so that I may have no occasion to resume," I went on, seeing him about to speak, "you will do me a kindness, sir. I come to you as privately as possible because you announced this impression of yours to me in a confidence which I have really wished to respect—and which I always have respected, as you remember. I have mentioned my illness. There really is no reason why I should hesitate to say that I know very well that any little delicacy I might have had in making a request to you is quite removed. Therefore I make the entreaty I have now preferred, and I hope you will have sufficient consideration for me to accede to it."

I must do Mr. Guppy the further justice of saying that he had looked more and more ashamed and that he looked most ashamed and very earnest when he now replied with a burning face, "Upon my word and honour, upon my life, upon my soul, Miss Summerson, as I am a living man, I'll act according to your wish! I'll never go another step in opposition to it. I'll take my oath to it if it will be any satisfaction to you. In what I promise at this present time touching the matters now in question," continued Mr. Guppy rapidly, as if he were repeating a familiar form of words, "I speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so—"

"I am quite satisfied," said I, rising at this point, "and I thank you very much. Caddy, my dear, I am ready!"

Mr. Guppy's mother returned with Caddy (now making me the recipient of her silent laughter and her nudges), and we took our leave. Mr. Guppy saw us to the door with the air of one who was either imperfectly awake or walking in his sleep; and we left him there, staring.

But in a minute he came after us down the street without any hat, and with his long hair all blown about, and stopped us, saying fervently, “Miss Summerson, upon my honour and soul, you may depend upon me!”

“I do,” said I, “quite confidently.”

“I beg your pardon, miss,” said Mr. Guppy, going with one leg and staying with the other, “but this lady being present—your own witness—it might be a satisfaction to your mind (which I should wish to set at rest) if you was to repeat those admissions.”

“Well, Caddy,” said I, turning to her, “perhaps you will not be surprised when I tell you, my dear, that there never has been any engagement—”

“No proposal or promise of marriage whatsoever,” suggested Mr. Guppy.

“No proposal or promise of marriage whatsoever,” said I, “between this gentleman—”

“William Guppy, of Penton Place, Pentonville, in the county of Middlesex,” he murmured.

“Between this gentleman, Mr. William Guppy, of Penton Place, Pentonville, in the county of Middlesex, and myself.”

“Thank you, miss,” said Mr. Guppy. “Very full—er—excuse me—lady’s name, Christian and surname both?”

I gave them.

“Married woman, I believe?” said Mr. Guppy. “Married woman. Thank you. Formerly Caroline Jellyby, spinster, then of Thavies Inn, within the city of London, but extra-parochial; now of Newman Street, Oxford Street. Much obliged.”

He ran home and came running back again.

“Touching that matter, you know, I really and truly am very sorry that my arrangements in life, combined with circumstances over which I have no control, should prevent a renewal of what was wholly terminated some time back,” said Mr. Guppy to me forlornly and despondently, “but it couldn’t be. Now COULD it, you know! I only put it to you.”

I replied it certainly could not. The subject did not admit of a doubt. He thanked me and ran to his mother’s again—and back again.

“It’s very honourable of you, miss, I am sure,” said Mr. Guppy. “If an altar could be erected in the bowers of friendship—but, upon my soul, you may rely upon me in every respect save and except the tender passion only!”

The struggle in Mr. Guppy's breast and the numerous oscillations it occasioned him between his mother's door and us were sufficiently conspicuous in the windy street (particularly as his hair wanted cutting) to make us hurry away. I did so with a lightened heart; but when we last looked back, Mr. Guppy was still oscillating in the same troubled state of mind.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Attorney and Client

THE NAME OF MR. Vholes, preceded by the legend Ground-Floor, is inscribed upon a door-post in Symond's Inn, Chancery Lane—a little, pale, wall-eyed, woebegone inn like a large dust-binn of two compartments and a sifter. It looks as if Symond were a sparing man in his way and constructed his inn of old building materials which took kindly to the dry rot and to dirt and all things decaying and dismal, and perpetuated Symond's memory with congenial shabbiness. Quartered in this dingy hatchment commemorative of Symond are the legal bearings of Mr. Vholes.

Mr. Vholes's office, in disposition retiring and in situation retired, is squeezed up in a corner and blinks at a dead wall. Three feet of knotty-floored dark passage bring the client to Mr. Vholes's jet-black door, in an angle profoundly dark on the brightest midsummer morning and encumbered by a black bulk-head of cellarage staircase against which belated civilians generally strike their brows. Mr. Vholes's chambers are on so small a scale that one clerk can open the door without getting off his stool, while the other who elbows him at the same desk has equal facilities for poking the fire. A smell as of unwholesome sheep blending with the smell of must and dust is referable to the nightly (and often daily) consumption of mutton fat in candles and to the fretting of parchment forms and skins in greasy drawers. The atmosphere is otherwise stale and close. The place was last painted or whitewashed beyond the memory of man, and the two chimneys smoke, and there is a loose outer surface of soot everywhere, and the dull cracked windows in their heavy frames have but one piece of character in them, which is a determination to be always dirty and always shut unless coerced. This accounts for the phenomenon of the weaker of the two usually having a bundle of firewood thrust between its jaws in hot weather.

Mr. Vholes is a very respectable man. He has not a large business, but he is a very respectable man. He is allowed by the greater attorneys who have

made good fortunes or are making them to be a most respectable man. He never misses a chance in his practice, which is a mark of respectability. He never takes any pleasure, which is another mark of respectability. He is reserved and serious, which is another mark of respectability. His digestion is impaired, which is highly respectable. And he is making hay of the grass which is flesh, for his three daughters. And his father is dependent on him in the Vale of Taunton.

The one great principle of the English law is to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble.

But not perceiving this quite plainly—only seeing it by halves in a confused way—the laity sometimes suffer in peace and pocket, with a bad grace, and DO grumble very much. Then this respectability of Mr. Vholes is brought into powerful play against them. “Repeal this statute, my good sir?” says Mr. Kenge to a smarting client. “Repeal it, my dear sir? Never, with my consent. Alter this law, sir, and what will be the effect of your rash proceeding on a class of practitioners very worthily represented, allow me to say to you, by the opposite attorney in the case, Mr. Vholes? Sir, that class of practitioners would be swept from the face of the earth. Now you cannot afford—I will say, the social system cannot afford—to lose an order of men like Mr. Vholes. Diligent, persevering, steady, acute in business. My dear sir, I understand your present feelings against the existing state of things, which I grant to be a little hard in your case; but I can never raise my voice for the demolition of a class of men like Mr. Vholes.” The respectability of Mr. Vholes has even been cited with crushing effect before Parliamentary committees, as in the following blue minutes of a distinguished attorney’s evidence. “Question (number five hundred and seventeen thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine): If I understand you, these forms of practice indisputably occasion delay? Answer: Yes, some delay. Question: And great expense? Answer: Most assuredly they cannot be gone through for nothing. Question: And unspeakable vexation? Answer: I am not prepared to say that. They have never given ME any vexation; quite the contrary. Question: But you think that their abolition

would damage a class of practitioners? Answer: I have no doubt of it. Question: Can you instance any type of that class? Answer: Yes. I would unhesitatingly mention Mr. Vholes. He would be ruined. Question: Mr. Vholes is considered, in the profession, a respectable man? Answer:"—which proved fatal to the inquiry for ten years—"Mr. Vholes is considered, in the profession, a MOST respectable man."

So in familiar conversation, private authorities no less disinterested will remark that they don't know what this age is coming to, that we are plunging down precipices, that now here is something else gone, that these changes are death to people like Vholes—a man of undoubted respectability, with a father in the Vale of Taunton, and three daughters at home. Take a few steps more in this direction, say they, and what is to become of Vholes's father? Is he to perish? And of Vholes's daughters? Are they to be shirt-makers, or governesses? As though, Mr. Vholes and his relations being minor cannibal chiefs and it being proposed to abolish cannibalism, indignant champions were to put the case thus: Make man-eating unlawful, and you starve the Vholeses!

In a word, Mr. Vholes, with his three daughters and his father in the Vale of Taunton, is continually doing duty, like a piece of timber, to shore up some decayed foundation that has become a pitfall and a nuisance. And with a great many people in a great many instances, the question is never one of a change from wrong to right (which is quite an extraneous consideration), but is always one of injury or advantage to that eminently respectable legion, Vholes.

The Chancellor is, within these ten minutes, "up" for the long vacation. Mr. Vholes, and his young client, and several blue bags hastily stuffed out of all regularity of form, as the larger sort of serpents are in their first gorged state, have returned to the official den. Mr. Vholes, quiet and unmoved, as a man of so much respectability ought to be, takes off his close black gloves as if he were skinning his hands, lifts off his tight hat as if he were scalping himself, and sits down at his desk. The client throws his hat and gloves upon the ground—tosses them anywhere, without looking after them or caring where they go; flings himself into a chair, half sighing and half groaning; rests his aching head upon his hand and looks the portrait of young despair.

"Again nothing done!" says Richard. "Nothing, nothing done!"

“Don’t say nothing done, sir,” returns the placid Vholes. “That is scarcely fair, sir, scarcely fair!”

“Why, what IS done?” says Richard, turning gloomily upon him.

“That may not be the whole question,” returns Vholes, “The question may branch off into what is doing, what is doing?”

“And what is doing?” asks the moody client.

Vholes, sitting with his arms on the desk, quietly bringing the tips of his five right fingers to meet the tips of his five left fingers, and quietly separating them again, and fixedly and slowly looking at his client, replies, “A good deal is doing, sir. We have put our shoulders to the wheel, Mr. Carstone, and the wheel is going round.”

“Yes, with Ixion on it. How am I to get through the next four or five accursed months?” exclaims the young man, rising from his chair and walking about the room.

“Mr. C.,” returns Vholes, following him close with his eyes wherever he goes, “your spirits are hasty, and I am sorry for it on your account. Excuse me if I recommend you not to chafe so much, not to be so impetuous, not to wear yourself out so. You should have more patience. You should sustain yourself better.”

“I ought to imitate you, in fact, Mr. Vholes?” says Richard, sitting down again with an impatient laugh and beating the devil’s tattoo with his boot on the patternless carpet.

“Sir,” returns Vholes, always looking at the client as if he were making a lingering meal of him with his eyes as well as with his professional appetite. “Sir,” returns Vholes with his inward manner of speech and his bloodless quietude, “I should not have had the presumption to propose myself as a model for your imitation or any man’s. Let me but leave the good name to my three daughters, and that is enough for me; I am not a self-seeker. But since you mention me so pointedly, I will acknowledge that I should like to impart to you a little of my—come, sir, you are disposed to call it insensibility, and I am sure I have no objection—say insensibility—a little of my insensibility.”

“Mr. Vholes,” explains the client, somewhat abashed, “I had no intention to accuse you of insensibility.”

“I think you had, sir, without knowing it,” returns the equable Vholes. “Very naturally. It is my duty to attend to your interests with a cool head,

and I can quite understand that to your excited feelings I may appear, at such times as the present, insensible. My daughters may know me better; my aged father may know me better. But they have known me much longer than you have, and the confiding eye of affection is not the distrustful eye of business. Not that I complain, sir, of the eye of business being distrustful; quite the contrary. In attending to your interests, I wish to have all possible checks upon me; it is right that I should have them; I court inquiry. But your interests demand that I should be cool and methodical, Mr. Carstone; and I cannot be otherwise—no, sir, not even to please you."

Mr. Vholes, after glancing at the official cat who is patiently watching a mouse's hole, fixes his charmed gaze again on his young client and proceeds in his buttoned-up, half-audible voice as if there were an unclean spirit in him that will neither come out nor speak out, "What are you to do, sir, you inquire, during the vacation. I should hope you gentlemen of the army may find many means of amusing yourselves if you give your minds to it. If you had asked me what I was to do during the vacation, I could have answered you more readily. I am to attend to your interests. I am to be found here, day by day, attending to your interests. That is my duty, Mr. C., and term-time or vacation makes no difference to me. If you wish to consult me as to your interests, you will find me here at all times alike. Other professional men go out of town. I don't. Not that I blame them for going; I merely say I don't go. This desk is your rock, sir!"

Mr. Vholes gives it a rap, and it sounds as hollow as a coffin. Not to Richard, though. There is encouragement in the sound to him. Perhaps Mr. Vholes knows there is.

"I am perfectly aware, Mr. Vholes," says Richard, more familiarly and good-humouredly, "that you are the most reliable fellow in the world and that to have to do with you is to have to do with a man of business who is not to be hoodwinked. But put yourself in my case, dragging on this dislocated life, sinking deeper and deeper into difficulty every day, continually hoping and continually disappointed, conscious of change upon change for the worse in myself, and of no change for the better in anything else, and you will find it a dark-looking case sometimes, as I do."

"You know," says Mr. Vholes, "that I never give hopes, sir. I told you from the first, Mr. C., that I never give hopes. Particularly in a case like this, where the greater part of the costs comes out of the estate, I should not be

considerate of my good name if I gave hopes. It might seem as if costs were my object. Still, when you say there is no change for the better, I must, as a bare matter of fact, deny that."

"Aye?" returns Richard, brightening. "But how do you make it out?"

"Mr. Carstone, you are represented by—"

"You said just now—a rock."

"Yes, sir," says Mr. Vholes, gently shaking his head and rapping the hollow desk, with a sound as if ashes were falling on ashes, and dust on dust, "a rock. That's something. You are separately represented, and no longer hidden and lost in the interests of others. THAT'S something. The suit does not sleep; we wake it up, we air it, we walk it about. THAT'S something. It's not all Jarndyce, in fact as well as in name. THAT'S something. Nobody has it all his own way now, sir. And THAT'S something, surely."

Richard, his face flushing suddenly, strikes the desk with his clenched hand.

"Mr. Vholes! If any man had told me when I first went to John Jarndyce's house that he was anything but the disinterested friend he seemed—that he was what he has gradually turned out to be—I could have found no words strong enough to repel the slander; I could not have defended him too ardently. So little did I know of the world! Whereas now I do declare to you that he becomes to me the embodiment of the suit; that in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce; that the more I suffer, the more indignant I am with him; that every new delay and every new disappointment is only a new injury from John Jarndyce's hand."

"No, no," says Vholes. "Don't say so. We ought to have patience, all of us. Besides, I never disparage, sir. I never disparage."

"Mr. Vholes," returns the angry client. "You know as well as I that he would have strangled the suit if he could."

"He was not active in it," Mr. Vholes admits with an appearance of reluctance. "He certainly was not active in it. But however, but however, he might have had amiable intentions. Who can read the heart, Mr. C.!"

"You can," returns Richard.

"I, Mr. C.?"

"Well enough to know what his intentions were. Are or are not our interests conflicting? Tell—me—that!" says Richard, accompanying his last three words with three raps on his rock of trust.

“Mr. C.,” returns Vholes, immovable in attitude and never winking his hungry eyes, “I should be wanting in my duty as your professional adviser, I should be departing from my fidelity to your interests, if I represented those interests as identical with the interests of Mr. Jarndyce. They are no such thing, sir. I never impute motives; I both have and am a father, and I never impute motives. But I must not shrink from a professional duty, even if it sows dissensions in families. I understand you to be now consulting me professionally as to your interests? You are so? I reply, then, they are not identical with those of Mr. Jarndyce.”

“Of course they are not!” cries Richard. “You found that out long ago.”

“Mr. C.,” returns Vholes, “I wish to say no more of any third party than is necessary. I wish to leave my good name unsullied, together with any little property of which I may become possessed through industry and perseverance, to my daughters Emma, Jane, and Caroline. I also desire to live in amity with my professional brethren. When Mr. Skimpole did me the honour, sir—I will not say the very high honour, for I never stoop to flattery—of bringing us together in this room, I mentioned to you that I could offer no opinion or advice as to your interests while those interests were entrusted to another member of the profession. And I spoke in such terms as I was bound to speak of Kenge and Carboy’s office, which stands high. You, sir, thought fit to withdraw your interests from that keeping nevertheless and to offer them to me. You brought them with clean hands, sir, and I accepted them with clean hands. Those interests are now paramount in this office. My digestive functions, as you may have heard me mention, are not in a good state, and rest might improve them; but I shall not rest, sir, while I am your representative. Whenever you want me, you will find me here. Summon me anywhere, and I will come. During the long vacation, sir, I shall devote my leisure to studying your interests more and more closely and to making arrangements for moving heaven and earth (including, of course, the Chancellor) after Michaelmas term; and when I ultimately congratulate you, sir,” says Mr. Vholes with the severity of a determined man, “when I ultimately congratulate you, sir, with all my heart, on your accession to fortune—which, but that I never give hopes, I might say something further about—you will owe me nothing beyond whatever little balance may be then outstanding of the costs as between solicitor and client not included in the taxed costs allowed out of the estate. I pretend to

no claim upon you, Mr. C., but for the zealous and active discharge—not the languid and routine discharge, sir: that much credit I stipulate for—of my professional duty. My duty prosperously ended, all between us is ended."

Vholes finally adds, by way of rider to this declaration of his principles, that as Mr. Carstone is about to rejoin his regiment, perhaps Mr. C. will favour him with an order on his agent for twenty pounds on account.

"For there have been many little consultations and attendances of late, sir," observes Vholes, turning over the leaves of his diary, "and these things mount up, and I don't profess to be a man of capital. When we first entered on our present relations I stated to you openly—it is a principle of mine that there never can be too much openness between solicitor and client—that I was not a man of capital and that if capital was your object you had better leave your papers in Kenge's office. No, Mr. C., you will find none of the advantages or disadvantages of capital here, sir. This," Vholes gives the desk one hollow blow again, "is your rock; it pretends to be nothing more."

The client, with his dejection insensibly relieved and his vague hopes rekindled, takes pen and ink and writes the draft, not without perplexed consideration and calculation of the date it may bear, implying scant effects in the agent's hands. All the while, Vholes, buttoned up in body and mind, looks at him attentively. All the while, Vholes's official cat watches the mouse's hole.

Lastly, the client, shaking hands, beseeches Mr. Vholes, for heaven's sake and earth's sake, to do his utmost to "pull him through" the Court of Chancery. Mr. Vholes, who never gives hopes, lays his palm upon the client's shoulder and answers with a smile, "Always here, sir. Personally, or by letter, you will always find me here, sir, with my shoulder to the wheel." Thus they part, and Vholes, left alone, employs himself in carrying sundry little matters out of his diary into his draft bill book for the ultimate behoof of his three daughters. So might an industrious fox or bear make up his account of chickens or stray travellers with an eye to his cubs, not to disparage by that word the three raw-visaged, lank, and buttoned-up maidens who dwell with the parent Vholes in an earthy cottage situated in a damp garden at Kennington.

Richard, emerging from the heavy shade of Symond's Inn into the sunshine of Chancery Lane—for there happens to be sunshine there to-day

—walks thoughtfully on, and turns into Lincoln’s Inn, and passes under the shadow of the Lincoln’s Inn trees. On many such loungers have the speckled shadows of those trees often fallen; on the like bent head, the bitten nail, the lowering eye, the lingering step, the purposeless and dreamy air, the good consuming and consumed, the life turned sour. This lounger is not shabby yet, but that may come. Chancery, which knows no wisdom but in precedent, is very rich in such precedents; and why should one be different from ten thousand?

Yet the time is so short since his depreciation began that as he saunters away, reluctant to leave the spot for some long months together, though he hates it, Richard himself may feel his own case as if it were a startling one. While his heart is heavy with corroding care, suspense, distrust, and doubt, it may have room for some sorrowful wonder when he recalls how different his first visit there, how different he, how different all the colours of his mind. But injustice breeds injustice; the fighting with shadows and being defeated by them necessitates the setting up of substances to combat; from the impalpable suit which no man alive can understand, the time for that being long gone by, it has become a gloomy relief to turn to the palpable figure of the friend who would have saved him from this ruin and make HIM his enemy. Richard has told Vholes the truth. Is he in a hardened or a softened mood, he still lays his injuries equally at that door; he was thwarted, in that quarter, of a set purpose, and that purpose could only originate in the one subject that is resolving his existence into itself; besides, it is a justification to him in his own eyes to have an embodied antagonist and oppressor.

Is Richard a monster in all this, or would Chancery be found rich in such precedents too if they could be got for citation from the Recording Angel?

Two pairs of eyes not unused to such people look after him, as, biting his nails and brooding, he crosses the square and is swallowed up by the shadow of the southern gateway. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle are the possessors of those eyes, and they have been leaning in conversation against the low stone parapet under the trees. He passes close by them, seeing nothing but the ground.

“William,” says Mr. Weevle, adjusting his whiskers, “there’s combustion going on there! It’s not a case of spontaneous, but it’s smouldering combustion it is.”

“Ah!” says Mr. Guppy. “He wouldn’t keep out of Jarndyce, and I suppose he’s over head and ears in debt. I never knew much of him. He was as high as the monument when he was on trial at our place. A good riddance to me, whether as clerk or client! Well, Tony, that as I was mentioning is what they’re up to.”

Mr. Guppy, refolding his arms, resettles himself against the parapet, as resuming a conversation of interest.

“They are still up to it, sir,” says Mr. Guppy, “still taking stock, still examining papers, still going over the heaps and heaps of rubbish. At this rate they’ll be at it these seven years.”

“And Small is helping?”

“Small left us at a week’s notice. Told Kenge his grandfather’s business was too much for the old gentleman and he could better himself by undertaking it. There had been a coolness between myself and Small on account of his being so close. But he said you and I began it, and as he had me there—for we did—I put our acquaintance on the old footing. That’s how I come to know what they’re up to.”

“You haven’t looked in at all?”

“Tony,” says Mr. Guppy, a little disconcerted, “to be unreserved with you, I don’t greatly relish the house, except in your company, and therefore I have not; and therefore I proposed this little appointment for our fetching away your things. There goes the hour by the clock! Tony”—Mr. Guppy becomes mysteriously and tenderly eloquent—“it is necessary that I should impress upon your mind once more that circumstances over which I have no control have made a melancholy alteration in my most cherished plans and in that unrequited image which I formerly mentioned to you as a friend. That image is shattered, and that idol is laid low. My only wish now in connexion with the objects which I had an idea of carrying out in the court with your aid as a friend is to let ’em alone and bury ’em in oblivion. Do you think it possible, do you think it at all likely (I put it to you, Tony, as a friend), from your knowledge of that capricious and deep old character who fell a prey to the—spontaneous element, do you, Tony, think it at all likely that on second thoughts he put those letters away anywhere, after you saw him alive, and that they were not destroyed that night?”

Mr. Weevle reflects for some time. Shakes his head. Decidedly thinks not.

“Tony,” says Mr. Guppy as they walk towards the court, “once again understand me, as a friend. Without entering into further explanations, I may repeat that the idol is down. I have no purpose to serve now but burial in oblivion. To that I have pledged myself. I owe it to myself, and I owe it to the shattered image, as also to the circumstances over which I have no control. If you was to express to me by a gesture, by a wink, that you saw lying anywhere in your late lodgings any papers that so much as looked like the papers in question, I would pitch them into the fire, sir, on my own responsibility.”

Mr. Weevle nods. Mr. Guppy, much elevated in his own opinion by having delivered these observations, with an air in part forensic and in part romantic—this gentleman having a passion for conducting anything in the form of an examination, or delivering anything in the form of a summing up or a speech—accompanies his friend with dignity to the court.

Never since it has been a court has it had such a Fortunatus’ purse of gossip as in the proceedings at the rag and bottle shop. Regularly, every morning at eight, is the elder Mr. Smallweed brought down to the corner and carried in, accompanied by Mrs. Smallweed, Judy, and Bart; and regularly, all day, do they all remain there until nine at night, solaced by gipsy dinners, not abundant in quantity, from the cook’s shop, rummaging and searching, digging, delving, and diving among the treasures of the late lamented. What those treasures are they keep so secret that the court is maddened. In its delirium it imagines guineas pouring out of tea-pots, crown-pieces overflowing punch-bowls, old chairs and mattresses stuffed with Bank of England notes. It possesses itself of the sixpenny history (with highly coloured folding frontispiece) of Mr. Daniel Dancer and his sister, and also of Mr. Elwes, of Suffolk, and transfers all the facts from those authentic narratives to Mr. Krook. Twice when the dustman is called in to carry off a cartload of old paper, ashes, and broken bottles, the whole court assembles and pries into the baskets as they come forth. Many times the two gentlemen who write with the ravenous little pens on the tissue-paper are seen prowling in the neighbourhood—shy of each other, their late partnership being dissolved. The Sol skilfully carries a vein of the prevailing interest through the Harmonic nights. Little Swills, in what are professionally known as “patter” allusions to the subject, is received with loud applause; and the same vocalist “gags” in the regular business like a

man inspired. Even Miss M. Melvilleson, in the revived Caledonian melody of “We’re a-Nodding,” points the sentiment that “the dogs love broo” (whatever the nature of that refreshment may be) with such archness and such a turn of the head towards next door that she is immediately understood to mean Mr. Smallweed loves to find money, and is nightly honoured with a double encore. For all this, the court discovers nothing; and as Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins now communicate to the late lodger whose appearance is the signal for a general rally, it is in one continual ferment to discover everything, and more.

Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy, with every eye in the court’s head upon them, knock at the closed door of the late lamented’s house, in a high state of popularity. But being contrary to the court’s expectation admitted, they immediately become unpopular and are considered to mean no good.

The shutters are more or less closed all over the house, and the ground-floor is sufficiently dark to require candles. Introduced into the back shop by Mr. Smallweed the younger, they, fresh from the sunlight, can at first see nothing save darkness and shadows; but they gradually discern the elder Mr. Smallweed seated in his chair upon the brink of a well or grave of waste-paper, the virtuous Judy groping therein like a female sexton, and Mrs. Smallweed on the level ground in the vicinity snowed up in a heap of paper fragments, print, and manuscript which would appear to be the accumulated compliments that have been sent flying at her in the course of the day. The whole party, Small included, are blackened with dust and dirt and present a fiendish appearance not relieved by the general aspect of the room. There is more litter and lumber in it than of old, and it is dirtier if possible; likewise, it is ghostly with traces of its dead inhabitant and even with his chalked writing on the wall.

On the entrance of visitors, Mr. Smallweed and Judy simultaneously fold their arms and stop in their researches.

“Aha!” croaks the old gentleman. “How de do, gentlemen, how de do! Come to fetch your property, Mr. Weevle? That’s well, that’s well. Ha! Ha! We should have been forced to sell you up, sir, to pay your warehouse room if you had left it here much longer. You feel quite at home here again, I dare say? Glad to see you, glad to see you!”

Mr. Weevle, thanking him, casts an eye about. Mr. Guppy’s eye follows Mr. Weevle’s eye. Mr. Weevle’s eye comes back without any new

intelligence in it. Mr. Guppy's eye comes back and meets Mr. Smallweed's eye. That engaging old gentleman is still murmuring, like some wound-up instrument running down, "How de do, sir—how de—how—" And then having run down, he lapses into grinning silence, as Mr. Guppy starts at seeing Mr. Tulkinghorn standing in the darkness opposite with his hands behind him.

"Gentleman so kind as to act as my solicitor," says Grandfather Smallweed. "I am not the sort of client for a gentleman of such note, but he is so good!"

Mr. Guppy, slightly nudging his friend to take another look, makes a shuffling bow to Mr. Tulkinghorn, who returns it with an easy nod. Mr. Tulkinghorn is looking on as if he had nothing else to do and were rather amused by the novelty.

"A good deal of property here, sir, I should say," Mr. Guppy observes to Mr. Smallweed.

"Principally rags and rubbish, my dear friend! Rags and rubbish! Me and Bart and my granddaughter Judy are endeavouring to make out an inventory of what's worth anything to sell. But we haven't come to much as yet; we—haven't—come—to—hah!"

Mr. Smallweed has run down again, while Mr. Weevle's eye, attended by Mr. Guppy's eye, has again gone round the room and come back.

"Well, sir," says Mr. Weevle. "We won't intrude any longer if you'll allow us to go upstairs."

"Anywhere, my dear sir, anywhere! You're at home. Make yourself so, pray!"

As they go upstairs, Mr. Guppy lifts his eyebrows inquiringly and looks at Tony. Tony shakes his head. They find the old room very dull and dismal, with the ashes of the fire that was burning on that memorable night yet in the discoloured grate. They have a great disinclination to touch any object, and carefully blow the dust from it first. Nor are they desirous to prolong their visit, packing the few movables with all possible speed and never speaking above a whisper.

"Look here," says Tony, recoiling. "Here's that horrible cat coming in!"

Mr. Guppy retreats behind a chair. "Small told me of her. She went leaping and bounding and tearing about that night like a dragon, and got out on the house-top, and roamed about up there for a fortnight, and then came

tumbling down the chimney very thin. Did you ever see such a brute? Looks as if she knew all about it, don't she? Almost looks as if she was Krook. Shoohoo! Get out, you goblin!"

Lady Jane, in the doorway, with her tiger snarl from ear to ear and her club of a tail, shows no intention of obeying; but Mr. Tulkinghorn stumbling over her, she spits at his rusty legs, and swearing wrathfully, takes her arched back upstairs. Possibly to roam the house-tops again and return by the chimney.

"Mr. Guppy," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "could I have a word with you?"

Mr. Guppy is engaged in collecting the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty from the wall and depositing those works of art in their old ignoble band-box. "Sir," he returns, reddening, "I wish to act with courtesy towards every member of the profession, and especially, I am sure, towards a member of it so well known as yourself—I will truly add, sir, so distinguished as yourself. Still, Mr. Tulkinghorn, sir, I must stipulate that if you have any word with me, that word is spoken in the presence of my friend."

"Oh, indeed?" says Mr. Tulkinghorn.

"Yes, sir. My reasons are not of a personal nature at all, but they are amply sufficient for myself."

"No doubt, no doubt." Mr. Tulkinghorn is as imperturbable as the hearthstone to which he has quietly walked. "The matter is not of that consequence that I need put you to the trouble of making any conditions, Mr. Guppy." He pauses here to smile, and his smile is as dull and rusty as his pantaloons. "You are to be congratulated, Mr. Guppy; you are a fortunate young man, sir."

"Pretty well so, Mr. Tulkinghorn; I don't complain."

"Complain? High friends, free admission to great houses, and access to elegant ladies! Why, Mr. Guppy, there are people in London who would give their ears to be you."

Mr. Guppy, looking as if he would give his own reddening and still reddening ears to be one of those people at present instead of himself, replies, "Sir, if I attend to my profession and do what is right by Kenge and Carboy, my friends and acquaintances are of no consequence to them nor to any member of the profession, not excepting Mr. Tulkinghorn of the Fields. I am not under any obligation to explain myself further; and with all respect for you, sir, and without offence—I repeat, without offence—"

“Oh, certainly!”

“—I don’t intend to do it.”

“Quite so,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn with a calm nod. “Very good; I see by these portraits that you take a strong interest in the fashionable great, sir?”

He addresses this to the astounded Tony, who admits the soft impeachment.

“A virtue in which few Englishmen are deficient,” observes Mr. Tulkinghorn. He has been standing on the hearthstone with his back to the smoked chimney-piece, and now turns round with his glasses to his eyes. “Who is this? ‘Lady Dedlock.’ Ha! A very good likeness in its way, but it wants force of character. Good day to you, gentlemen; good day!”

When he has walked out, Mr. Guppy, in a great perspiration, nerves himself to the hasty completion of the taking down of the Galaxy Gallery, concluding with Lady Dedlock.

“Tony,” he says hurriedly to his astonished companion, “let us be quick in putting the things together and in getting out of this place. It were in vain longer to conceal from you, Tony, that between myself and one of the members of a swan-like aristocracy whom I now hold in my hand, there has been undivulged communication and association. The time might have been when I might have revealed it to you. It never will be more. It is due alike to the oath I have taken, alike to the shattered idol, and alike to circumstances over which I have no control, that the whole should be buried in oblivion. I charge you as a friend, by the interest you have ever testified in the fashionable intelligence, and by any little advances with which I may have been able to accommodate you, so to bury it without a word of inquiry!”

This charge Mr. Guppy delivers in a state little short of forensic lunacy, while his friend shows a dazed mind in his whole head of hair and even in his cultivated whiskers.

CHAPTER XL

National and Domestic

ENGLAND HAS BEEN IN a dreadful state for some weeks. Lord Coodle would go out, Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn't come in, and there being nobody in Great Britain (to speak of) except Coodle and Doodle, there has been no government. It is a mercy that the hostile meeting between those two great men, which at one time seemed inevitable, did not come off, because if both pistols had taken effect, and Coodle and Doodle had killed each other, it is to be presumed that England must have waited to be governed until young Coodle and young Doodle, now in frocks and long stockings, were grown up. This stupendous national calamity, however, was averted by Lord Coodle's making the timely discovery that if in the heat of debate he had said that he scorned and despised the whole ignoble career of Sir Thomas Doodle, he had merely meant to say that party differences should never induce him to withhold from it the tribute of his warmest admiration; while it as opportunely turned out, on the other hand, that Sir Thomas Doodle had in his own bosom expressly booked Lord Coodle to go down to posterity as the mirror of virtue and honour. Still England has been some weeks in the dismal strait of having no pilot (as was well observed by Sir Leicester Dedlock) to weather the storm; and the marvellous part of the matter is that England has not appeared to care very much about it, but has gone on eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage as the old world did in the days before the flood. But Coodle knew the danger, and Doodle knew the danger, and all their followers and hangers-on had the clearest possible perception of the danger. At last Sir Thomas Doodle has not only condescended to come in, but has done it handsomely, bringing in with him all his nephews, all his male cousins, and all his brothers-in-law. So there is hope for the old ship yet.

Doodle has found that he must throw himself upon the country, chiefly in the form of sovereigns and beer. In this metamorphosed state he is available in a good many places simultaneously and can throw himself upon

a considerable portion of the country at one time. Britannia being much occupied in pocketing Doodle in the form of sovereigns, and swallowing Doodle in the form of beer, and in swearing herself black in the face that she does neither—plainly to the advancement of her glory and morality—the London season comes to a sudden end, through all the Doodleites and Coodleites dispersing to assist Britannia in those religious exercises.

Hence Mrs. Rouncewell, housekeeper at Chesney Wold, foresees, though no instructions have yet come down, that the family may shortly be expected, together with a pretty large accession of cousins and others who can in any way assist the great Constitutional work. And hence the stately old dame, taking Time by the forelock, leads him up and down the staircases, and along the galleries and passages, and through the rooms, to witness before he grows any older that everything is ready, that floors are rubbed bright, carpets spread, curtains shaken out, beds puffed and patted, still-room and kitchen cleared for action—all things prepared as beseems the Dedlock dignity.

This present summer evening, as the sun goes down, the preparations are complete. Dreary and solemn the old house looks, with so many appliances of habitation and with no inhabitants except the pictured forms upon the walls. So did these come and go, a Dedlock in possession might have ruminated passing along; so did they see this gallery hushed and quiet, as I see it now; so think, as I think, of the gap that they would make in this domain when they were gone; so find it, as I find it, difficult to believe that it could be without them; so pass from my world, as I pass from theirs, now closing the reverberating door; so leave no blank to miss them, and so die.

Through some of the fiery windows beautiful from without, and set, at this sunset hour, not in dull-grey stone but in a glorious house of gold, the light excluded at other windows pours in rich, lavish, overflowing like the summer plenty in the land. Then do the frozen Dedlocks thaw. Strange movements come upon their features as the shadows of leaves play there. A dense justice in a corner is beguiled into a wink. A staring baronet, with a truncheon, gets a dimple in his chin. Down into the bosom of a stony shepherdess there steals a fleck of light and warmth that would have done it good a hundred years ago. One ancestress of Volumnia, in high-heeled shoes, very like her—casting the shadow of that virgin event before her full two centuries—shoots out into a halo and becomes a saint. A maid of

honour of the court of Charles the Second, with large round eyes (and other charms to correspond), seems to bathe in glowing water, and it ripples as it glows.

But the fire of the sun is dying. Even now the floor is dusky, and shadow slowly mounts the walls, bringing the Dedlocks down like age and death. And now, upon my Lady's picture over the great chimney-piece, a weird shade falls from some old tree, that turns it pale, and flutters it, and looks as if a great arm held a veil or hood, watching an opportunity to draw it over her. Higher and darker rises shadow on the wall—now a red gloom on the ceiling—now the fire is out.

All that prospect, which from the terrace looked so near, has moved solemnly away and changed—not the first nor the last of beautiful things that look so near and will so change—into a distant phantom. Light mists arise, and the dew falls, and all the sweet scents in the garden are heavy in the air. Now the woods settle into great masses as if they were each one profound tree. And now the moon rises to separate them, and to glimmer here and there in horizontal lines behind their stems, and to make the avenue a pavement of light among high cathedral arches fantastically broken.

Now the moon is high; and the great house, needing habitation more than ever, is like a body without life. Now it is even awful, stealing through it, to think of the live people who have slept in the solitary bedrooms, to say nothing of the dead. Now is the time for shadow, when every corner is a cavern and every downward step a pit, when the stained glass is reflected in pale and faded hues upon the floors, when anything and everything can be made of the heavy staircase beams excepting their own proper shapes, when the armour has dull lights upon it not easily to be distinguished from stealthy movement, and when barred helmets are frightfully suggestive of heads inside. But of all the shadows in Chesney Wold, the shadow in the long drawing-room upon my Lady's picture is the first to come, the last to be disturbed. At this hour and by this light it changes into threatening hands raised up and menacing the handsome face with every breath that stirs.

"She is not well, ma'am," says a groom in Mrs. Rouncewell's audience-chamber.

"My Lady not well! What's the matter?"

"Why, my Lady has been but poorly, ma'am, since she was last here—I

don’t mean with the family, ma’am, but when she was here as a bird of passage like. My Lady has not been out much, for her, and has kept her room a good deal.”

“Chesney Wold, Thomas,” rejoins the housekeeper with proud complacency, “will set my Lady up! There is no finer air and no healthier soil in the world!”

Thomas may have his own personal opinions on this subject, probably hints them in his manner of smoothing his sleek head from the nape of his neck to his temples, but he forbears to express them further and retires to the servants’ hall to regale on cold meat-pie and ale.

This groom is the pilot-fish before the nobler shark. Next evening, down come Sir Leicester and my Lady with their largest retinue, and down come the cousins and others from all the points of the compass. Thenceforth for some weeks backward and forward rush mysterious men with no names, who fly about all those particular parts of the country on which Doodle is at present throwing himself in an auriferous and malty shower, but who are merely persons of a restless disposition and never do anything anywhere.

On these national occasions Sir Leicester finds the cousins useful. A better man than the Honourable Bob Stables to meet the Hunt at dinner, there could not possibly be. Better got up gentlemen than the other cousins to ride over to polling-booths and hustings here and there, and show themselves on the side of England, it would be hard to find. Volumnia is a little dim, but she is of the true descent; and there are many who appreciate her sprightly conversation, her French conundrums so old as to have become in the cycles of time almost new again, the honour of taking the fair Dedlock in to dinner, or even the privilege of her hand in the dance. On these national occasions dancing may be a patriotic service, and Volumnia is constantly seen hopping about for the good of an ungrateful and unpensioning country.

My Lady takes no great pains to entertain the numerous guests, and being still unwell, rarely appears until late in the day. But at all the dismal dinners, leaden lunches, basilisk balls, and other melancholy pageants, her mere appearance is a relief. As to Sir Leicester, he conceives it utterly impossible that anything can be wanting, in any direction, by any one who has the good fortune to be received under that roof; and in a state of sublime satisfaction, he moves among the company, a magnificent refrigerator.

Daily the cousins trot through dust and canter over roadside turf, away to hustings and polling-booths (with leather gloves and hunting-whips for the counties and kid gloves and riding-canes for the boroughs), and daily bring back reports on which Sir Leicester holds forth after dinner. Daily the restless men who have no occupation in life present the appearance of being rather busy. Daily Volumnia has a little cousinly talk with Sir Leicester on the state of the nation, from which Sir Leicester is disposed to conclude that Volumnia is a more reflecting woman than he had thought her.

"How are we getting on?" says Miss Volumnia, clasping her hands. "ARE we safe?"

The mighty business is nearly over by this time, and Doodle will throw himself off the country in a few days more. Sir Leicester has just appeared in the long drawing-room after dinner, a bright particular star surrounded by clouds of cousins.

"Volumnia," replies Sir Leicester, who has a list in his hand, "we are doing tolerably."

"Only tolerably!"

Although it is summer weather, Sir Leicester always has his own particular fire in the evening. He takes his usual screened seat near it and repeats with much firmness and a little displeasure, as who should say, I am not a common man, and when I say tolerably, it must not be understood as a common expression, "Volumnia, we are doing tolerably."

"At least there is no opposition to YOU," Volumnia asserts with confidence.

"No, Volumnia. This distracted country has lost its senses in many respects, I grieve to say, but—"

"It is not so mad as that. I am glad to hear it!"

Volumnia's finishing the sentence restores her to favour. Sir Leicester, with a gracious inclination of his head, seems to say to himself, "A sensible woman this, on the whole, though occasionally precipitate."

In fact, as to this question of opposition, the fair Dedlock's observation was superfluous, Sir Leicester on these occasions always delivering in his own candidateship, as a kind of handsome wholesale order to be promptly executed. Two other little seats that belong to him he treats as retail orders of less importance, merely sending down the men and signifying to the tradespeople, "You will have the goodness to make these materials into two

members of Parliament and to send them home when done."

"I regret to say, Volumnia, that in many places the people have shown a bad spirit, and that this opposition to the government has been of a most determined and most implacable description."

"W-r-retches!" says Volumnia.

"Even," proceeds Sir Leicester, glancing at the circumjacent cousins on sofas and ottomans, "even in many—in fact, in most—of those places in which the government has carried it against a faction—"

(Note, by the way, that the Coodleites are always a faction with the Doodleites, and that the Doodleites occupy exactly the same position towards the Coodleites.)

"—Even in them I am shocked, for the credit of Englishmen, to be constrained to inform you that the party has not triumphed without being put to an enormous expense. Hundreds," says Sir Leicester, eyeing the cousins with increasing dignity and swelling indignation, "hundreds of thousands of pounds!"

If Volumnia have a fault, it is the fault of being a trifle too innocent, seeing that the innocence which would go extremely well with a sash and tucker is a little out of keeping with the rouge and pearl necklace. Howbeit, impelled by innocence, she asks, "What for?"

"Volumnia," remonstrates Sir Leicester with his utmost severity. "Volumnia!"

"No, no, I don't mean what for," cries Volumnia with her favourite little scream. "How stupid I am! I mean what a pity!"

"I am glad," returns Sir Leicester, "that you do mean what a pity."

Volumnia hastens to express her opinion that the shocking people ought to be tried as traitors and made to support the party.

"I am glad, Volumnia," repeats Sir Leicester, unmindful of these mollifying sentiments, "that you do mean what a pity. It is disgraceful to the electors. But as you, though inadvertently and without intending so unreasonable a question, asked me 'what for?' let me reply to you. For necessary expenses. And I trust to your good sense, Volumnia, not to pursue the subject, here or elsewhere."

Sir Leicester feels it incumbent on him to observe a crushing aspect towards Volumnia because it is whispered abroad that these necessary expenses will, in some two hundred election petitions, be unpleasantly

connected with the word bribery, and because some graceless jokers have consequently suggested the omission from the Church service of the ordinary supplication in behalf of the High Court of Parliament and have recommended instead that the prayers of the congregation be requested for six hundred and fifty-eight gentlemen in a very unhealthy state.

“I suppose,” observes Volumnia, having taken a little time to recover her spirits after her late castigation, “I suppose Mr. Tulkinghorn has been worked to death.”

“I don’t know,” says Sir Leicester, opening his eyes, “why Mr. Tulkinghorn should be worked to death. I don’t know what Mr. Tulkinghorn’s engagements may be. He is not a candidate.”

Volumnia had thought he might have been employed. Sir Leicester could desire to know by whom, and what for. Volumnia, abashed again, suggests, by somebody—to advise and make arrangements. Sir Leicester is not aware that any client of Mr. Tulkinghorn has been in need of his assistance.

Lady Dedlock, seated at an open window with her arm upon its cushioned ledge and looking out at the evening shadows falling on the park, has seemed to attend since the lawyer’s name was mentioned.

A languid cousin with a moustache in a state of extreme debility now observes from his couch that man told him ya’as’dy that Tulkinghorn had gone down t’ that iron place t’ give legal ’pinion ’bout something, and that contest being over t’ day, ’twould be highly jawlly thing if Tulkinghorn should ’pear with news that Coodle man was floored.

Mercury in attendance with coffee informs Sir Leicester, hereupon, that Mr. Tulkinghorn has arrived and is taking dinner. My Lady turns her head inward for the moment, then looks out again as before.

Volumnia is charmed to hear that her delight is come. He is so original, such a stolid creature, such an immense being for knowing all sorts of things and never telling them! Volumnia is persuaded that he must be a Freemason. Is sure he is at the head of a lodge, and wears short aprons, and is made a perfect idol of with candlesticks and trowels. These lively remarks the fair Dedlock delivers in her youthful manner, while making a purse.

“He has not been here once,” she adds, “since I came. I really had some thoughts of breaking my heart for the inconstant creature. I had almost made up my mind that he was dead.”

It may be the gathering gloom of evening, or it may be the darker gloom within herself, but a shade is on my Lady's face, as if she thought, "I would he were!"

"Mr. Tulkinghorn," says Sir Leicester, "is always welcome here and always discreet wheresoever he is. A very valuable person, and deservedly respected."

The debilitated cousin supposes he is "'normously rich fler."

"He has a stake in the country," says Sir Leicester, "I have no doubt. He is, of course, handsomely paid, and he associates almost on a footing of equality with the highest society."

Everybody starts. For a gun is fired close by.

"Good gracious, what's that?" cries Volumnia with her little withered scream.

"A rat," says my Lady. "And they have shot him."

Enter Mr. Tulkinghorn, followed by Mercuries with lamps and candles.

"No, no," says Sir Leicester, "I think not. My Lady, do you object to the twilight?"

On the contrary, my Lady prefers it.

"Volumnia?"

Oh! Nothing is so delicious to Volumnia as to sit and talk in the dark.

"Then take them away," says Sir Leicester. "Tulkinghorn, I beg your pardon. How do you do?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn with his usual leisurely ease advances, renders his passing homage to my Lady, shakes Sir Leicester's hand, and subsides into the chair proper to him when he has anything to communicate, on the opposite side of the Baronet's little newspaper-table. Sir Leicester is apprehensive that my Lady, not being very well, will take cold at that open window. My Lady is obliged to him, but would rather sit there for the air. Sir Leicester rises, adjusts her scarf about her, and returns to his seat. Mr. Tulkinghorn in the meanwhile takes a pinch of snuff.

"Now," says Sir Leicester. "How has that contest gone?"

"Oh, hollow from the beginning. Not a chance. They have brought in both their people. You are beaten out of all reason. Three to one."

It is a part of Mr. Tulkinghorn's policy and mastery to have no political opinions; indeed, NO opinions. Therefore he says "you" are beaten, and not "we."

Sir Leicester is majestically wroth. Volumnia never heard of such a thing. ‘The debilitated cousin holds that it’s sort of thing that’s sure tapn slongs votes—giv’n—Mob.

“It’s the place, you know,” Mr. Tulkinghorn goes on to say in the fast-increasing darkness when there is silence again, “where they wanted to put up Mrs. Rouncewell’s son.”

“A proposal which, as you correctly informed me at the time, he had the becoming taste and perception,” observes Sir Leicester, “to decline. I cannot say that I by any means approve of the sentiments expressed by Mr. Rouncewell when he was here for some half-hour in this room, but there was a sense of propriety in his decision which I am glad to acknowledge.”

“Ha!” says Mr. Tulkinghorn. “It did not prevent him from being very active in this election, though.”

Sir Leicester is distinctly heard to gasp before speaking. “Did I understand you? Did you say that Mr. Rouncewell had been very active in this election?”

“Uncommonly active.”

“Against—”

“Oh, dear yes, against you. He is a very good speaker. Plain and emphatic. He made a damaging effect, and has great influence. In the business part of the proceedings he carried all before him.”

It is evident to the whole company, though nobody can see him, that Sir Leicester is staring majestically.

“And he was much assisted,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn as a wind-up, “by his son.”

“By his son, sir?” repeats Sir Leicester with awful politeness.

“By his son.”

“The son who wished to marry the young woman in my Lady’s service?”

“That son. He has but one.”

“Then upon my honour,” says Sir Leicester after a terrific pause during which he has been heard to snort and felt to stare, “then upon my honour, upon my life, upon my reputation and principles, the floodgates of society are burst open, and the waters have—a—obliterated the landmarks of the framework of the cohesion by which things are held together!”

General burst of cousinly indignation. Volumnia thinks it is really high time, you know, for somebody in power to step in and do something strong.

Debilitated cousin thinks—country's going—Dayvle—steeple-chase pace.

"I beg," says Sir Leicester in a breathless condition, "that we may not comment further on this circumstance. Comment is superfluous. My Lady, let me suggest in reference to that young woman—"

"I have no intention," observes my Lady from her window in a low but decided tone, "of parting with her."

"That was not my meaning," returns Sir Leicester. "I am glad to hear you say so. I would suggest that as you think her worthy of your patronage, you should exert your influence to keep her from these dangerous hands. You might show her what violence would be done in such association to her duties and principles, and you might preserve her for a better fate. You might point out to her that she probably would, in good time, find a husband at Chesney Wold by whom she would not be—" Sir Leicester adds, after a moment's consideration, "dragged from the altars of her forefathers."

These remarks he offers with his unvarying politeness and deference when he addresses himself to his wife. She merely moves her head in reply. The moon is rising, and where she sits there is a little stream of cold pale light, in which her head is seen.

"It is worthy of remark," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "however, that these people are, in their way, very proud."

"Proud?" Sir Leicester doubts his hearing.

"I should not be surprised if they all voluntarily abandoned the girl—yes, lover and all—instead of her abandoning them, supposing she remained at Chesney Wold under such circumstances."

"Well!" says Sir Leicester tremulously. "Well! You should know, Mr. Tulkinghorn. You have been among them."

"Really, Sir Leicester," returns the lawyer, "I state the fact. Why, I could tell you a story—with Lady Dedlock's permission."

Her head concedes it, and Volumnia is enchanted. A story! Oh, he is going to tell something at last! A ghost in it, Volumnia hopes?

"No. Real flesh and blood." Mr. Tulkinghorn stops for an instant and repeats with some little emphasis grafted upon his usual monotony, "Real flesh and blood, Miss Dedlock. Sir Leicester, these particulars have only lately become known to me. They are very brief. They exemplify what I have said. I suppress names for the present. Lady Dedlock will not think me

ill-bred, I hope?”

By the light of the fire, which is low, he can be seen looking towards the moonlight. By the light of the moon Lady Dedlock can be seen, perfectly still.

“A townsman of this Mrs. Rouncewell, a man in exactly parallel circumstances as I am told, had the good fortune to have a daughter who attracted the notice of a great lady. I speak of really a great lady, not merely great to him, but married to a gentleman of your condition, Sir Leicester.”

Sir Leicester condescendingly says, “Yes, Mr. Tulkinghorn,” implying that then she must have appeared of very considerable moral dimensions indeed in the eyes of an iron-master.

“The lady was wealthy and beautiful, and had a liking for the girl, and treated her with great kindness, and kept her always near her. Now this lady preserved a secret under all her greatness, which she had preserved for many years. In fact, she had in early life been engaged to marry a young rake—he was a captain in the army—nothing connected with whom came to any good. She never did marry him, but she gave birth to a child of which he was the father.”

By the light of the fire he can be seen looking towards the moonlight. By the moonlight, Lady Dedlock can be seen in profile, perfectly still.

“The captain in the army being dead, she believed herself safe; but a train of circumstances with which I need not trouble you led to discovery. As I received the story, they began in an imprudence on her own part one day when she was taken by surprise, which shows how difficult it is for the firmest of us (she was very firm) to be always guarded. There was great domestic trouble and amazement, you may suppose; I leave you to imagine, Sir Leicester, the husband’s grief. But that is not the present point. When Mr. Rouncewell’s townsman heard of the disclosure, he no more allowed the girl to be patronized and honoured than he would have suffered her to be trodden underfoot before his eyes. Such was his pride, that he indignantly took her away, as if from reproach and disgrace. He had no sense of the honour done him and his daughter by the lady’s condescension; not the least. He resented the girl’s position, as if the lady had been the commonest of commoners. That is the story. I hope Lady Dedlock will excuse its painful nature.”

There are various opinions on the merits, more or less conflicting with

Volumnia's. That fair young creature cannot believe there ever was any such lady and rejects the whole history on the threshold. The majority incline to the debilitated cousin's sentiment, which is in few words—"no business—Rouncewell's fernal townsman." Sir Leicester generally refers back in his mind to Wat Tyler and arranges a sequence of events on a plan of his own.

There is not much conversation in all, for late hours have been kept at Chesney Wold since the necessary expenses elsewhere began, and this is the first night in many on which the family have been alone. It is past ten when Sir Leicester begs Mr. Tulkinghorn to ring for candles. Then the stream of moonlight has swelled into a lake, and then Lady Dedlock for the first time moves, and rises, and comes forward to a table for a glass of water. Winking cousins, bat-like in the candle glare, crowd round to give it; Volumnia (always ready for something better if procurable) takes another, a very mild sip of which contents her; Lady Dedlock, graceful, self-possessed, looked after by admiring eyes, passes away slowly down the long perspective by the side of that nymph, not at all improving her as a question of contrast.

CHAPTER XLI

In Mr. Tulkinghorn’s Room

MR. TULKINGHORN ARRIVES IN his turret-room a little breathed by the journey up, though leisurely performed. There is an expression on his face as if he had discharged his mind of some grave matter and were, in his close way, satisfied. To say of a man so severely and strictly self-repressed that he is triumphant would be to do him as great an injustice as to suppose him troubled with love or sentiment or any romantic weakness. He is sedately satisfied. Perhaps there is a rather increased sense of power upon him as he loosely grasps one of his veinous wrists with his other hand and holding it behind his back walks noiselessly up and down.

There is a capacious writing-table in the room on which is a pretty large accumulation of papers. The green lamp is lighted, his reading-glasses lie upon the desk, the easy-chair is wheeled up to it, and it would seem as though he had intended to bestow an hour or so upon these claims on his attention before going to bed. But he happens not to be in a business mind. After a glance at the documents awaiting his notice—with his head bent low over the table, the old man’s sight for print or writing being defective at night—he opens the French window and steps out upon the leads. There he again walks slowly up and down in the same attitude, subsiding, if a man so cool may have any need to subside, from the story he has related downstairs.

The time was once when men as knowing as Mr. Tulkinghorn would walk on turret-tops in the starlight and look up into the sky to read their fortunes there. Hosts of stars are visible to-night, though their brilliancy is eclipsed by the splendour of the moon. If he be seeking his own star as he methodically turns and turns upon the leads, it should be but a pale one to be so rustily represented below. If he be tracing out his destiny, that may be written in other characters nearer to his hand.

As he paces the leads with his eyes most probably as high above his thoughts as they are high above the earth, he is suddenly stopped in passing

the window by two eyes that meet his own. The ceiling of his room is rather low; and the upper part of the door, which is opposite the window, is of glass. There is an inner baize door, too, but the night being warm he did not close it when he came upstairs. These eyes that meet his own are looking in through the glass from the corridor outside. He knows them well. The blood has not flushed into his face so suddenly and redly for many a long year as when he recognizes Lady Dedlock.

He steps into the room, and she comes in too, closing both the doors behind her. There is a wild disturbance—is it fear or anger?—in her eyes. In her carriage and all else she looks as she looked downstairs two hours ago.

Is it fear or is it anger now? He cannot be sure. Both might be as pale, both as intent.

"Lady Dedlock?"

She does not speak at first, nor even when she has slowly dropped into the easy-chair by the table. They look at each other, like two pictures.

"Why have you told my story to so many persons?"

"Lady Dedlock, it was necessary for me to inform you that I knew it."

"How long have you known it?"

"I have suspected it a long while—fully known it a little while."

"Months?"

"Days."

He stands before her with one hand on a chair-back and the other in his old-fashioned waistcoat and shirt-frill, exactly as he has stood before her at any time since her marriage. The same formal politeness, the same composed deference that might as well be defiance; the whole man the same dark, cold object, at the same distance, which nothing has ever diminished.

"Is this true concerning the poor girl?"

He slightly inclines and advances his head as not quite understanding the question.

"You know what you related. Is it true? Do her friends know my story also? Is it the town-talk yet? Is it chalked upon the walls and cried in the streets?"

So! Anger, and fear, and shame. All three contending. What power this woman has to keep these raging passions down! Mr. Tulkinghorn's thoughts take such form as he looks at her, with his ragged grey eyebrows a hair's

breadth more contracted than usual under her gaze.

“No, Lady Dedlock. That was a hypothetical case, arising out of Sir Leicester’s unconsciously carrying the matter with so high a hand. But it would be a real case if they knew—what we know.”

“Then they do not know it yet?”

“No.”

“Can I save the poor girl from injury before they know it?”

“Really, Lady Dedlock,” Mr. Tulkinghorn replies, “I cannot give a satisfactory opinion on that point.”

And he thinks, with the interest of attentive curiosity, as he watches the struggle in her breast, “The power and force of this woman are astonishing!”

“Sir,” she says, for the moment obliged to set her lips with all the energy she has, that she may speak distinctly, “I will make it plainer. I do not dispute your hypothetical case. I anticipated it, and felt its truth as strongly as you can do, when I saw Mr. Rouncewell here. I knew very well that if he could have had the power of seeing me as I was, he would consider the poor girl tarnished by having for a moment been, although most innocently, the subject of my great and distinguished patronage. But I have an interest in her, or I should rather say—no longer belonging to this place—I had, and if you can find so much consideration for the woman under your foot as to remember that, she will be very sensible of your mercy.”

Mr. Tulkinghorn, profoundly attentive, throws this off with a shrug of self-depreciation and contracts his eyebrows a little more.

“You have prepared me for my exposure, and I thank you for that too. Is there anything that you require of me? Is there any claim that I can release or any charge or trouble that I can spare my husband in obtaining HIS release by certifying to the exactness of your discovery? I will write anything, here and now, that you will dictate. I am ready to do it.”

And she would do it, thinks the lawyer, watchful of the firm hand with which she takes the pen!

“I will not trouble you, Lady Dedlock. Pray spare yourself.”

“I have long expected this, as you know. I neither wish to spare myself nor to be spared. You can do nothing worse to me than you have done. Do what remains now.”

“Lady Dedlock, there is nothing to be done. I will take leave to say a few

words when you have finished."

Their need for watching one another should be over now, but they do it all this time, and the stars watch them both through the opened window. Away in the moonlight lie the woodland fields at rest, and the wide house is as quiet as the narrow one. The narrow one! Where are the digger and the spade, this peaceful night, destined to add the last great secret to the many secrets of the Tulkinghorn existence? Is the man born yet, is the spade wrought yet? Curious questions to consider, more curious perhaps not to consider, under the watching stars upon a summer night.

"Of repentance or remorse or any feeling of mine," Lady Dedlock presently proceeds, "I say not a word. If I were not dumb, you would be deaf. Let that go by. It is not for your ears."

He makes a feint of offering a protest, but she sweeps it away with her disdainful hand.

"Of other and very different things I come to speak to you. My jewels are all in their proper places of keeping. They will be found there. So, my dresses. So, all the valuables I have. Some ready money I had with me, please to say, but no large amount. I did not wear my own dress, in order that I might avoid observation. I went to be henceforward lost. Make this known. I leave no other charge with you."

"Excuse me, Lady Dedlock," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, quite unmoved. "I am not sure that I understand you. You want—"

"To be lost to all here. I leave Chesney Wold to-night. I go this hour."

Mr. Tulkinghorn shakes his head. She rises, but he, without moving hand from chair-back or from old-fashioned waistcoat and shirt-frill, shakes his head.

"What? Not go as I have said?"

"No, Lady Dedlock," he very calmly replies.

"Do you know the relief that my disappearance will be? Have you forgotten the stain and blot upon this place, and where it is, and who it is?"

"No, Lady Dedlock, not by any means."

Without deigning to rejoin, she moves to the inner door and has it in her hand when he says to her, without himself stirring hand or foot or raising his voice, "Lady Dedlock, have the goodness to stop and hear me, or before you reach the staircase I shall ring the alarm-bell and rouse the house. And then I must speak out before every guest and servant, every man and

woman, in it.”

He has conquered her. She falters, trembles, and puts her hand confusedly to her head. Slight tokens these in any one else, but when so practised an eye as Mr. Tulkinghorn’s sees indecision for a moment in such a subject, he thoroughly knows its value.

He promptly says again, “Have the goodness to hear me, Lady Dedlock,” and motions to the chair from which she has risen. She hesitates, but he motions again, and she sits down.

“The relations between us are of an unfortunate description, Lady Dedlock; but as they are not of my making, I will not apologize for them. The position I hold in reference to Sir Leicester is so well known to you that I can hardly imagine but that I must long have appeared in your eyes the natural person to make this discovery.”

“Sir,” she returns without looking up from the ground on which her eyes are now fixed, “I had better have gone. It would have been far better not to have detained me. I have no more to say.”

“Excuse me, Lady Dedlock, if I add a little more to hear.”

“I wish to hear it at the window, then. I can’t breathe where I am.”

His jealous glance as she walks that way betrays an instant’s misgiving that she may have it in her thoughts to leap over, and dashing against ledge and cornice, strike her life out upon the terrace below. But a moment’s observation of her figure as she stands in the window without any support, looking out at the stars—not up—gloomily out at those stars which are low in the heavens, reassures him. By facing round as she has moved, he stands a little behind her.

“Lady Dedlock, I have not yet been able to come to a decision satisfactory to myself on the course before me. I am not clear what to do or how to act next. I must request you, in the meantime, to keep your secret as you have kept it so long and not to wonder that I keep it too.”

He pauses, but she makes no reply.

“Pardon me, Lady Dedlock. This is an important subject. You are honouring me with your attention?”

“I am.”

“Thank you. I might have known it from what I have seen of your strength of character. I ought not to have asked the question, but I have the habit of making sure of my ground, step by step, as I go on. The sole

consideration in this unhappy case is Sir Leicester."

"Then why," she asks in a low voice and without removing her gloomy look from those distant stars, "do you detain me in his house?"

"Because he IS the consideration. Lady Dedlock, I have no occasion to tell you that Sir Leicester is a very proud man, that his reliance upon you is implicit, that the fall of that moon out of the sky would not amaze him more than your fall from your high position as his wife."

She breathes quickly and heavily, but she stands as unflinchingly as ever he has seen her in the midst of her grandest company.

"I declare to you, Lady Dedlock, that with anything short of this case that I have, I would as soon have hoped to root up by means of my own strength and my own hands the oldest tree on this estate as to shake your hold upon Sir Leicester and Sir Leicester's trust and confidence in you. And even now, with this case, I hesitate. Not that he could doubt (that, even with him, is impossible), but that nothing can prepare him for the blow."

"Not my flight?" she returned. "Think of it again."

"Your flight, Lady Dedlock, would spread the whole truth, and a hundred times the whole truth, far and wide. It would be impossible to save the family credit for a day. It is not to be thought of."

There is a quiet decision in his reply which admits of no remonstrance.

"When I speak of Sir Leicester being the sole consideration, he and the family credit are one. Sir Leicester and the baronetcy, Sir Leicester and Chesney Wold, Sir Leicester and his ancestors and his patrimony"—Mr. Tulkinghorn very dry here—"are, I need not say to you, Lady Dedlock, inseparable."

"Go on!"

"Therefore," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, pursuing his case in his jog-trot style, "I have much to consider. This is to be hushed up if it can be. How can it be, if Sir Leicester is driven out of his wits or laid upon a death-bed? If I inflicted this shock upon him to-morrow morning, how could the immediate change in him be accounted for? What could have caused it? What could have divided you? Lady Dedlock, the wall-chalking and the street-crying would come on directly, and you are to remember that it would not affect you merely (whom I cannot at all consider in this business) but your husband, Lady Dedlock, your husband."

He gets plainer as he gets on, but not an atom more emphatic or

animated.

“There is another point of view,” he continues, “in which the case presents itself. Sir Leicester is devoted to you almost to infatuation. He might not be able to overcome that infatuation, even knowing what we know. I am putting an extreme case, but it might be so. If so, it were better that he knew nothing. Better for common sense, better for him, better for me. I must take all this into account, and it combines to render a decision very difficult.”

She stands looking out at the same stars without a word. They are beginning to pale, and she looks as if their coldness froze her.

“My experience teaches me,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn, who has by this time got his hands in his pockets and is going on in his business consideration of the matter like a machine. “My experience teaches me, Lady Dedlock, that most of the people I know would do far better to leave marriage alone. It is at the bottom of three fourths of their troubles. So I thought when Sir Leicester married, and so I always have thought since. No more about that. I must now be guided by circumstances. In the meanwhile I must beg you to keep your own counsel, and I will keep mine.”

“I am to drag my present life on, holding its pains at your pleasure, day by day?” she asks, still looking at the distant sky.

“Yes, I am afraid so, Lady Dedlock.”

“It is necessary, you think, that I should be so tied to the stake?”

“I am sure that what I recommend is necessary.”

“I am to remain on this gaudy platform on which my miserable deception has been so long acted, and it is to fall beneath me when you give the signal?” she said slowly.

“Not without notice, Lady Dedlock. I shall take no step without forewarning you.”

She asks all her questions as if she were repeating them from memory or calling them over in her sleep.

“We are to meet as usual?”

“Precisely as usual, if you please.”

“And I am to hide my guilt, as I have done so many years?”

“As you have done so many years. I should not have made that reference myself, Lady Dedlock, but I may now remind you that your secret can be no heavier to you than it was, and is no worse and no better than it was. I

know it certainly, but I believe we have never wholly trusted each other."

She stands absorbed in the same frozen way for some little time before asking, "Is there anything more to be said to-night?"

"Why," Mr. Tulkinghorn returns methodically as he softly rubs his hands, "I should like to be assured of your acquiescence in my arrangements, Lady Dedlock."

"You may be assured of it."

"Good. And I would wish in conclusion to remind you, as a business precaution, in case it should be necessary to recall the fact in any communication with Sir Leicester, that throughout our interview I have expressly stated my sole consideration to be Sir Leicester's feelings and honour and the family reputation. I should have been happy to have made Lady Dedlock a prominent consideration, too, if the case had admitted of it; but unfortunately it does not."

"I can attest your fidelity, sir."

Both before and after saying it she remains absorbed, but at length moves, and turns, unshaken in her natural and acquired presence, towards the door. Mr. Tulkinghorn opens both the doors exactly as he would have done yesterday, or as he would have done ten years ago, and makes his old-fashioned bow as she passes out. It is not an ordinary look that he receives from the handsome face as it goes into the darkness, and it is not an ordinary movement, though a very slight one, that acknowledges his courtesy. But as he reflects when he is left alone, the woman has been putting no common constraint upon herself.

He would know it all the better if he saw the woman pacing her own rooms with her hair wildly thrown from her flung-back face, her hands clasped behind her head, her figure twisted as if by pain. He would think so all the more if he saw the woman thus hurrying up and down for hours, without fatigue, without intermission, followed by the faithful step upon the Ghost's Walk. But he shuts out the now chilled air, draws the window-curtain, goes to bed, and falls asleep. And truly when the stars go out and the wan day peeps into the turret-chamber, finding him at his oldest, he looks as if the digger and the spade were both commissioned and would soon be digging.

The same wan day peeps in at Sir Leicester pardoning the repentant country in a majestically condescending dream; and at the cousins entering

on various public employments, principally receipt of salary; and at the chaste Volumnia, bestowing a dower of fifty thousand pounds upon a hideous old general with a mouth of false teeth like a pianoforte too full of keys, long the admiration of Bath and the terror of every other community. Also into rooms high in the roof, and into offices in court-yards, and over stables, where humbler ambition dreams of bliss, in keepers' lodges, and in holy matrimony with Will or Sally. Up comes the bright sun, drawing everything up with it—the Wills and Sallys, the latent vapour in the earth, the drooping leaves and flowers, the birds and beasts and creeping things, the gardeners to sweep the dewy turf and unfold emerald velvet where the roller passes, the smoke of the great kitchen fire wreathing itself straight and high into the lightsome air. Lastly, up comes the flag over Mr. Tulkinghorn's unconscious head cheerfully proclaiming that Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock are in their happy home and that there is hospitality at the place in Lincolnshire.

CHAPTER XLII

In Mr. Tulkinghorn’s Chambers

FROM THE VERDANT UNDULATIONS and the spreading oaks of the Dedlock property, Mr. Tulkinghorn transfers himself to the stale heat and dust of London. His manner of coming and going between the two places is one of his impenetrabilities. He walks into Chesney Wold as if it were next door to his chambers and returns to his chambers as if he had never been out of Lincoln’s Inn Fields. He neither changes his dress before the journey nor talks of it afterwards. He melted out of his turret-room this morning, just as now, in the late twilight, he melts into his own square.

Like a dingy London bird among the birds at roost in these pleasant fields, where the sheep are all made into parchment, the goats into wigs, and the pasture into chaff, the lawyer, smoke-dried and faded, dwelling among mankind but not consorting with them, aged without experience of genial youth, and so long used to make his cramped nest in holes and corners of human nature that he has forgotten its broader and better range, comes sauntering home. In the oven made by the hot pavements and hot buildings, he has baked himself dryer than usual; and he has in his thirsty mind his mellowed port-wine half a century old.

The lamplighter is skipping up and down his ladder on Mr. Tulkinghorn’s side of the Fields when that high-priest of noble mysteries arrives at his own dull court-yard. He ascends the door-steps and is gliding into the dusky hall when he encounters, on the top step, a bowing and propitiatory little man.

“Is that Snagsby?”

“Yes, sir. I hope you are well, sir. I was just giving you up, sir, and going home.”

“Aye? What is it? What do you want with me?”

“Well, sir,” says Mr. Snagsby, holding his hat at the side of his head in his deference towards his best customer, “I was wishful to say a word to you, sir.”

“Can you say it here?”

“Perfectly, sir.”

“Say it then.” The lawyer turns, leans his arms on the iron railing at the top of the steps, and looks at the lamplighter lighting the court-yard.

“It is relating,” says Mr. Snagsby in a mysterious low voice, “it is relating—not to put too fine a point upon it—to the foreigner, sir!”

Mr. Tulkinghorn eyes him with some surprise. “What foreigner?”

“The foreign female, sir. French, if I don’t mistake? I am not acquainted with that language myself, but I should judge from her manners and appearance that she was French; anyways, certainly foreign. Her that was upstairs, sir, when Mr. Bucket and me had the honour of waiting upon you with the sweeping-boy that night.”

“Oh! Yes, yes. Mademoiselle Hortense.”

“Indeed, sir?” Mr. Snagsby coughs his cough of submission behind his hat. “I am not acquainted myself with the names of foreigners in general, but I have no doubt it WOULD be that.” Mr. Snagsby appears to have set out in this reply with some desperate design of repeating the name, but on reflection coughs again to excuse himself.

“And what can you have to say, Snagsby,” demands Mr. Tulkinghorn, “about her?”

“Well, sir,” returns the stationer, shading his communication with his hat, “it falls a little hard upon me. My domestic happiness is very great—at least, it’s as great as can be expected, I’m sure—but my little woman is rather given to jealousy. Not to put too fine a point upon it, she is very much given to jealousy. And you see, a foreign female of that genteel appearance coming into the shop, and hovering—I should be the last to make use of a strong expression if I could avoid it, but hovering, sir—in the court—you know it is—now ain’t it? I only put it to yourself, sir.”

Mr. Snagsby, having said this in a very plaintive manner, throws in a cough of general application to fill up all the blanks.

“Why, what do you mean?” asks Mr. Tulkinghorn.

“Just so, sir,” returns Mr. Snagsby; “I was sure you would feel it yourself and would excuse the reasonableness of MY feelings when coupled with the known excitableness of my little woman. You see, the foreign female—which you mentioned her name just now, with quite a native sound I am sure—caught up the word Snagsby that night, being uncommon quick, and

made inquiry, and got the direction and come at dinner-time. Now Guster, our young woman, is timid and has fits, and she, taking fright at the foreigner's looks—which are fierce—and at a grinding manner that she has of speaking—which is calculated to alarm a weak mind—gave way to it, instead of bearing up against it, and tumbled down the kitchen stairs out of one into another, such fits as I do sometimes think are never gone into, or come out of, in any house but ours. Consequently there was by good fortune ample occupation for my little woman, and only me to answer the shop. When she DID say that Mr. Tulkinghorn, being always denied to her by his employer (which I had no doubt at the time was a foreign mode of viewing a clerk), she would do herself the pleasure of continually calling at my place until she was let in here. Since then she has been, as I began by saying, hovering, hovering, sir"—Mr. Snagsby repeats the word with pathetic emphasis—"in the court. The effects of which movement it is impossible to calculate. I shouldn't wonder if it might have already given rise to the painfullest mistakes even in the neighbours' minds, not mentioning (if such a thing was possible) my little woman. Whereas, goodness knows," says Mr. Snagsby, shaking his head, "I never had an idea of a foreign female, except as being formerly connected with a bunch of brooms and a baby, or at the present time with a tambourine and earrings. I never had, I do assure you, sir!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn had listened gravely to this complaint and inquires when the stationer has finished, "And that's all, is it, Snagsby?"

"Why yes, sir, that's all," says Mr. Snagsby, ending with a cough that plainly adds, "and it's enough too—for me."

"I don't know what Mademoiselle Hortense may want or mean, unless she is mad," says the lawyer.

"Even if she was, you know, sir," Mr. Snagsby pleads, "it wouldn't be a consolation to have some weapon or another in the form of a foreign dagger planted in the family."

"No," says the other. "Well, well! This shall be stopped. I am sorry you have been inconvenienced. If she comes again, send her here."

Mr. Snagsby, with much bowing and short apologetic coughing, takes his leave, lightened in heart. Mr. Tulkinghorn goes upstairs, saying to himself, "These women were created to give trouble the whole earth over. The mistress not being enough to deal with, here's the maid now! But I will be

short with THIS jade at least!”

So saying, he unlocks his door, gropes his way into his murky rooms, lights his candles, and looks about him. It is too dark to see much of the Allegory overhead there, but that importunate Roman, who is for ever toppling out of the clouds and pointing, is at his old work pretty distinctly. Not honouring him with much attention, Mr. Tulkinghorn takes a small key from his pocket, unlocks a drawer in which there is another key, which unlocks a chest in which there is another, and so comes to the cellar-key, with which he prepares to descend to the regions of old wine. He is going towards the door with a candle in his hand when a knock comes.

“Who’s this? Aye, aye, mistress, it’s you, is it? You appear at a good time. I have just been hearing of you. Now! What do you want?”

He stands the candle on the chimney-piece in the clerk’s hall and taps his dry cheek with the key as he addresses these words of welcome to Mademoiselle Hortense. That feline personage, with her lips tightly shut and her eyes looking out at him sideways, softly closes the door before replying.

“I have had great deal of trouble to find you, sir.”

“HAVE you!”

“I have been here very often, sir. It has always been said to me, he is not at home, he is engage, he is this and that, he is not for you.”

“Quite right, and quite true.”

“Not true. Lies!”

At times there is a suddenness in the manner of Mademoiselle Hortense so like a bodily spring upon the subject of it that such subject involuntarily starts and fails back. It is Mr. Tulkinghorn’s case at present, though Mademoiselle Hortense, with her eyes almost shut up (but still looking out sideways), is only smiling contemptuously and shaking her head.

“Now, mistress,” says the lawyer, tapping the key hastily upon the chimney-piece. “If you have anything to say, say it, say it.”

“Sir, you have not use me well. You have been mean and shabby.”

“Mean and shabby, eh?” returns the lawyer, rubbing his nose with the key.

“Yes. What is it that I tell you? You know you have. You have attrapped me—catched me—to give you information; you have asked me to show you the dress of mine my Lady must have wore that night, you have prayed me

to come in it here to meet that boy. Say! Is it not?" Mademoiselle Hortense makes another spring.

"You are a vixen, a vixen!" Mr. Tulkinghorn seems to meditate as he looks distrustfully at her, then he replies, "Well, wench, well. I paid you."

"You paid me!" she repeats with fierce disdain. "Two sovereign! I have not change them, I re-fuse them, I des-pise them, I throw them from me!" Which she literally does, taking them out of her bosom as she speaks and flinging them with such violence on the floor that they jerk up again into the light before they roll away into corners and slowly settle down there after spinning vehemently.

"Now!" says Mademoiselle Hortense, darkening her large eyes again. "You have paid me? Eh, my God, oh yes!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn rubs his head with the key while she entertains herself with a sarcastic laugh.

"You must be rich, my fair friend," he composedly observes, "to throw money about in that way!"

"I AM rich," she returns. "I am very rich in hate. I hate my Lady, of all my heart. You know that."

"Know it? How should I know it?"

"Because you have known it perfectly before you prayed me to give you that information. Because you have known perfectly that I was en-r-r-r-raged!" It appears impossible for mademoiselle to roll the letter "r" sufficiently in this word, notwithstanding that she assists her energetic delivery by clenching both her hands and setting all her teeth.

"Oh! I knew that, did I?" says Mr. Tulkinghorn, examining the wards of the key.

"Yes, without doubt. I am not blind. You have made sure of me because you knew that. You had reason! I det-est her." Mademoiselle folds her arms and throws this last remark at him over one of her shoulders.

"Having said this, have you anything else to say, mademoiselle?"

"I am not yet placed. Place me well. Find me a good condition! If you cannot, or do not choose to do that, employ me to pursue her, to chase her, to disgrace and to dishonour her. I will help you well, and with a good will. It is what YOU do. Do I not know that?"

"You appear to know a good deal," Mr. Tulkinghorn retorts.

"Do I not? Is it that I am so weak as to believe, like a child, that I come

here in that dress to rec-eive that boy only to decide a little bet, a wager? Eh, my God, oh yes!” In this reply, down to the word “wager” inclusive, mademoiselle has been ironically polite and tender, then as suddenly dashed into the bitterest and most defiant scorn, with her black eyes in one and the same moment very nearly shut and staringly wide open.

“Now, let us see,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn, tapping his chin with the key and looking imperturbably at her, “how this matter stands.”

“Ah! Let us see,” mademoiselle assents, with many angry and tight nods of her head.

“You come here to make a remarkably modest demand, which you have just stated, and it not being conceded, you will come again.”

“And again,” says mademoiselle with more tight and angry nods. “And yet again. And yet again. And many times again. In effect, for ever!”

“And not only here, but you will go to Mr. Snagsby’s too, perhaps? That visit not succeeding either, you will go again perhaps?”

“And again,” repeats mademoiselle, cataleptic with determination. “And yet again. And yet again. And many times again. In effect, for ever!”

“Very well. Now, Mademoiselle Hortense, let me recommend you to take the candle and pick up that money of yours. I think you will find it behind the clerk’s partition in the corner yonder.”

She merely throws a laugh over her shoulder and stands her ground with folded arms.

“You will not, eh?”

“No, I will not!”

“So much the poorer you; so much the richer I! Look, mistress, this is the key of my wine-cellar. It is a large key, but the keys of prisons are larger. In this city there are houses of correction (where the treadmills are, for women), the gates of which are very strong and heavy, and no doubt the keys too. I am afraid a lady of your spirit and activity would find it an inconvenience to have one of those keys turned upon her for any length of time. What do you think?”

“I think,” mademoiselle replies without any action and in a clear, obliging voice, “that you are a miserable wretch.”

“Probably,” returns Mr. Tulkinghorn, quietly blowing his nose. “But I don’t ask what you think of myself; I ask what you think of the prison.”

“Nothing. What does it matter to me?”

“Why, it matters this much, mistress,” says the lawyer, deliberately putting away his handkerchief and adjusting his frill; “the law is so despotic here that it interferes to prevent any of our good English citizens from being troubled, even by a lady’s visits against his desire. And on his complaining that he is so troubled, it takes hold of the troublesome lady and shuts her up in prison under hard discipline. Turns the key upon her, mistress.” Illustrating with the cellar-key.

“Truly?” returns mademoiselle in the same pleasant voice. “That is droll! But—my faith!—still what does it matter to me?”

“My fair friend,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn, “make another visit here, or at Mr. Snagsby’s, and you shall learn.”

“In that case you will send me to the prison, perhaps?”

“Perhaps.”

It would be contradictory for one in mademoiselle’s state of agreeable jocularity to foam at the mouth, otherwise a tigerish expansion thereabouts might look as if a very little more would make her do it.

“In a word, mistress,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn, “I am sorry to be unpolite, but if you ever present yourself uninvited here—or there—again, I will give you over to the police. Their gallantry is great, but they carry troublesome people through the streets in an ignominious manner, strapped down on a board, my good wench.”

“I will prove you,” whispers mademoiselle, stretching out her hand, “I will try if you dare to do it!”

“And if,” pursues the lawyer without minding her, “I place you in that good condition of being locked up in jail, it will be some time before you find yourself at liberty again.”

“I will prove you,” repeats mademoiselle in her former whisper.

“And now,” proceeds the lawyer, still without minding her, “you had better go. Think twice before you come here again.”

“Think you,” she answers, “twice two hundred times!”

“You were dismissed by your lady, you know,” Mr. Tulkinghorn observes, following her out upon the staircase, “as the most implacable and unmanageable of women. Now turn over a new leaf and take warning by what I say to you. For what I say, I mean; and what I threaten, I will do, mistress.”

She goes down without answering or looking behind her. When she is

gone, he goes down too, and returning with his cobweb-covered bottle, devotes himself to a leisurely enjoyment of its contents, now and then, as he throws his head back in his chair, catching sight of the pertinacious Roman pointing from the ceiling.

CHAPTER XLIII

Esther’s Narrative

IT MATTERS LITTLE NOW how much I thought of my living mother who had told me evermore to consider her dead. I could not venture to approach her or to communicate with her in writing, for my sense of the peril in which her life was passed was only to be equalled by my fears of increasing it. Knowing that my mere existence as a living creature was an unforeseen danger in her way, I could not always conquer that terror of myself which had seized me when I first knew the secret. At no time did I dare to utter her name. I felt as if I did not even dare to hear it. If the conversation anywhere, when I was present, took that direction, as it sometimes naturally did, I tried not to hear: I mentally counted, repeated something that I knew, or went out of the room. I am conscious now that I often did these things when there can have been no danger of her being spoken of, but I did them in the dread I had of hearing anything that might lead to her betrayal, and to her betrayal through me.

It matters little now how often I recalled the tones of my mother’s voice, wondered whether I should ever hear it again as I so longed to do, and thought how strange and desolate it was that it should be so new to me. It matters little that I watched for every public mention of my mother’s name; that I passed and repassed the door of her house in town, loving it, but afraid to look at it; that I once sat in the theatre when my mother was there and saw me, and when we were so wide asunder before the great company of all degrees that any link or confidence between us seemed a dream. It is all, all over. My lot has been so blest that I can relate little of myself which is not a story of goodness and generosity in others. I may well pass that little and go on.

When we were settled at home again, Ada and I had many conversations with my guardian of which Richard was the theme. My dear girl was deeply grieved that he should do their kind cousin so much wrong, but she was so faithful to Richard that she could not bear to blame him even for that. My

guardian was assured of it, and never coupled his name with a word of reproof. “Rick is mistaken, my dear,” he would say to her. “Well, well! We have all been mistaken over and over again. We must trust to you and time to set him right.”

We knew afterwards what we suspected then, that he did not trust to time until he had often tried to open Richard’s eyes. That he had written to him, gone to him, talked with him, tried every gentle and persuasive art his kindness could devise. Our poor devoted Richard was deaf and blind to all. If he were wrong, he would make amends when the Chancery suit was over. If he were groping in the dark, he could not do better than do his utmost to clear away those clouds in which so much was confused and obscured. Suspicion and misunderstanding were the fault of the suit? Then let him work the suit out and come through it to his right mind. This was his unvarying reply. Jarndyce and Jarndyce had obtained such possession of his whole nature that it was impossible to place any consideration before him which he did not, with a distorted kind of reason, make a new argument in favour of his doing what he did. “So that it is even more mischievous,” said my guardian once to me, “to remonstrate with the poor dear fellow than to leave him alone.”

I took one of these opportunities of mentioning my doubts of Mr. Skimpole as a good adviser for Richard.

“Adviser!” returned my guardian, laughing, “My dear, who would advise with Skimpole?”

“Encourager would perhaps have been a better word,” said I.

“Encourager!” returned my guardian again. “Who could be encouraged by Skimpole?”

“Not Richard?” I asked.

“No,” he replied. “Such an unworldly, uncalculating, gossamer creature is a relief to him and an amusement. But as to advising or encouraging or occupying a serious station towards anybody or anything, it is simply not to be thought of in such a child as Skimpole.”

“Pray, cousin John,” said Ada, who had just joined us and now looked over my shoulder, “what made him such a child?”

“What made him such a child?” inquired my guardian, rubbing his head, a little at a loss.

“Yes, cousin John.”

“Why,” he slowly replied, roughening his head more and more, “he is all sentiment, and—and susceptibility, and—and sensibility, and—and imagination. And these qualities are not regulated in him, somehow. I suppose the people who admired him for them in his youth attached too much importance to them and too little to any training that would have balanced and adjusted them, and so he became what he is. Hey?” said my guardian, stopping short and looking at us hopefully. “What do you think, you two?”

Ada, glancing at me, said she thought it was a pity he should be an expense to Richard.

“So it is, so it is,” returned my guardian hurriedly. “That must not be. We must arrange that. I must prevent it. That will never do.”

And I said I thought it was to be regretted that he had ever introduced Richard to Mr. Vholes for a present of five pounds.

“Did he?” said my guardian with a passing shade of vexation on his face. “But there you have the man. There you have the man! There is nothing mercenary in that with him. He has no idea of the value of money. He introduces Rick, and then he is good friends with Mr. Vholes and borrows five pounds of him. He means nothing by it and thinks nothing of it. He told you himself, I’ll be bound, my dear?”

“Oh, yes!” said I.

“Exactly!” cried my guardian, quite triumphant. “There you have the man! If he had meant any harm by it or was conscious of any harm in it, he wouldn’t tell it. He tells it as he does it in mere simplicity. But you shall see him in his own home, and then you’ll understand him better. We must pay a visit to Harold Skimpole and caution him on these points. Lord bless you, my dears, an infant, an infant!”

In pursuance of this plan, we went into London on an early day and presented ourselves at Mr. Skimpole’s door.

He lived in a place called the Polygon, in Somers Town, where there were at that time a number of poor Spanish refugees walking about in cloaks, smoking little paper cigars. Whether he was a better tenant than one might have supposed, in consequence of his friend Somebody always paying his rent at last, or whether his inaptitude for business rendered it particularly difficult to turn him out, I don’t know; but he had occupied the same house some years. It was in a state of dilapidation quite equal to our

expectation. Two or three of the area railings were gone, the water-butt was broken, the knocker was loose, the bell-handle had been pulled off a long time to judge from the rusty state of the wire, and dirty footprints on the steps were the only signs of its being inhabited.

A slatternly full-blown girl who seemed to be bursting out at the rents in her gown and the cracks in her shoes like an over-ripe berry answered our knock by opening the door a very little way and stopping up the gap with her figure. As she knew Mr. Jarndyce (indeed Ada and I both thought that she evidently associated him with the receipt of her wages), she immediately relented and allowed us to pass in. The lock of the door being in a disabled condition, she then applied herself to securing it with the chain, which was not in good action either, and said would we go upstairs?

We went upstairs to the first floor, still seeing no other furniture than the dirty footprints. Mr. Jarndyce without further ceremony entered a room there, and we followed. It was dingy enough and not at all clean, but furnished with an odd kind of shabby luxury, with a large footstool, a sofa, and plenty of cushions, an easy-chair, and plenty of pillows, a piano, books, drawing materials, music, newspapers, and a few sketches and pictures. A broken pane of glass in one of the dirty windows was papered and wafered over, but there was a little plate of hothouse nectarines on the table, and there was another of grapes, and another of sponge-cakes, and there was a bottle of light wine. Mr. Skimpole himself reclined upon the sofa in a dressing-gown, drinking some fragrant coffee from an old china cup—it was then about mid-day—and looking at a collection of wallflowers in the balcony.

He was not in the least disconcerted by our appearance, but rose and received us in his usual airy manner.

“Here I am, you see!” he said when we were seated, not without some little difficulty, the greater part of the chairs being broken. “Here I am! This is my frugal breakfast. Some men want legs of beef and mutton for breakfast; I don’t. Give me my peach, my cup of coffee, and my claret; I am content. I don’t want them for themselves, but they remind me of the sun. There’s nothing solar about legs of beef and mutton. Mere animal satisfaction!”

“This is our friend’s consulting-room (or would be, if he ever prescribed), his sanctum, his studio,” said my guardian to us.

“Yes,” said Mr. Skimpole, turning his bright face about, “this is the bird’s cage. This is where the bird lives and sings. They pluck his feathers now and then and clip his wings, but he sings, he sings!”

He handed us the grapes, repeating in his radiant way, “He sings! Not an ambitious note, but still he sings.”

“These are very fine,” said my guardian. “A present?”

“No,” he answered. “No! Some amiable gardener sells them. His man wanted to know, when he brought them last evening, whether he should wait for the money. ‘Really, my friend,’ I said, ‘I think not—if your time is of any value to you.’ I suppose it was, for he went away.”

My guardian looked at us with a smile, as though he asked us, “Is it possible to be worldly with this baby?”

“This is a day,” said Mr. Skimpole, gaily taking a little claret in a tumbler, “that will ever be remembered here. We shall call it Saint Clare and Saint Summerson day. You must see my daughters. I have a blue-eyed daughter who is my Beauty daughter, I have a Sentiment daughter, and I have a Comedy daughter. You must see them all. They’ll be enchanted.”

He was going to summon them when my guardian interposed and asked him to pause a moment, as he wished to say a word to him first. “My dear Jarndyce,” he cheerfully replied, going back to his sofa, “as many moments as you please. Time is no object here. We never know what o’clock it is, and we never care. Not the way to get on in life, you’ll tell me? Certainly. But we DON’T get on in life. We don’t pretend to do it.”

My guardian looked at us again, plainly saying, “You hear him?”

“Now, Harold,” he began, “the word I have to say relates to Rick.”

“The dearest friend I have!” returned Mr. Skimpole cordially. “I suppose he ought not to be my dearest friend, as he is not on terms with you. But he is, I can’t help it; he is full of youthful poetry, and I love him. If you don’t like it, I can’t help it. I love him.”

The engaging frankness with which he made this declaration really had a disinterested appearance and captivated my guardian, if not, for the moment, Ada too.

“You are welcome to love him as much as you like,” returned Mr. Jarndyce, “but we must save his pocket, Harold.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Skimpole. “His pocket? Now you are coming to what I don’t understand.” Taking a little more claret and dipping one of the cakes

in it, he shook his head and smiled at Ada and me with an ingenuous foreboding that he never could be made to understand.

"If you go with him here or there," said my guardian plainly, "you must not let him pay for both."

"My dear Jarndyce," returned Mr. Skimpole, his genial face irradiated by the comicality of this idea, "what am I to do? If he takes me anywhere, I must go. And how can I pay? I never have any money. If I had any money, I don't know anything about it. Suppose I say to a man, how much? Suppose the man says to me seven and sixpence? I know nothing about seven and sixpence. It is impossible for me to pursue the subject with any consideration for the man. I don't go about asking busy people what seven and sixpence is in Moorish—which I don't understand. Why should I go about asking them what seven and sixpence is in Money—which I don't understand?"

"Well," said my guardian, by no means displeased with this artless reply, "if you come to any kind of journeying with Rick, you must borrow the money of me (never breathing the least allusion to that circumstance), and leave the calculation to him."

"My dear Jarndyce," returned Mr. Skimpole, "I will do anything to give you pleasure, but it seems an idle form—a superstition. Besides, I give you my word, Miss Clare and my dear Miss Summerson, I thought Mr. Carstone was immensely rich. I thought he had only to make over something, or to sign a bond, or a draft, or a cheque, or a bill, or to put something on a file somewhere, to bring down a shower of money."

"Indeed it is not so, sir," said Ada. "He is poor."

"No, really?" returned Mr. Skimpole with his bright smile. "You surprise me.

"And not being the richer for trusting in a rotten reed," said my guardian, laying his hand emphatically on the sleeve of Mr. Skimpole's dressing-gown, "be you very careful not to encourage him in that reliance, Harold."

"My dear good friend," returned Mr. Skimpole, "and my dear Miss Simmerson, and my dear Miss Clare, how can I do that? It's business, and I don't know business. It is he who encourages me. He emerges from great feats of business, presents the brightest prospects before me as their result, and calls upon me to admire them. I do admire them—as bright prospects. But I know no more about them, and I tell him so."

The helpless kind of candour with which he presented this before us, the light-hearted manner in which he was amused by his innocence, the fantastic way in which he took himself under his own protection and argued about that curious person, combined with the delightful ease of everything he said exactly to make out my guardian's case. The more I saw of him, the more unlikely it seemed to me, when he was present, that he could design, conceal, or influence anything; and yet the less likely that appeared when he was not present, and the less agreeable it was to think of his having anything to do with any one for whom I cared.

Hearing that his examination (as he called it) was now over, Mr. Skimpole left the room with a radiant face to fetch his daughters (his sons had run away at various times), leaving my guardian quite delighted by the manner in which he had vindicated his childish character. He soon came back, bringing with him the three young ladies and Mrs. Skimpole, who had once been a beauty but was now a delicate high-nosed invalid suffering under a complication of disorders.

"This," said Mr. Skimpole, "is my Beauty daughter, Arethusa—plays and sings odds and ends like her father. This is my Sentiment daughter, Laura—plays a little but don't sing. This is my Comedy daughter, Kitty—sings a little but don't play. We all draw a little and compose a little, and none of us have any idea of time or money."

Mrs. Skimpole sighed, I thought, as if she would have been glad to strike out this item in the family attainments. I also thought that she rather impressed her sigh upon my guardian and that she took every opportunity of throwing in another.

"It is pleasant," said Mr. Skimpole, turning his sprightly eyes from one to the other of us, "and it is whimsically interesting to trace peculiarities in families. In this family we are all children, and I am the youngest."

The daughters, who appeared to be very fond of him, were amused by this droll fact, particularly the Comedy daughter.

"My dears, it is true," said Mr. Skimpole, "is it not? So it is, and so it must be, because like the dogs in the hymn, 'it is our nature to.' Now, here is Miss Summerson with a fine administrative capacity and a knowledge of details perfectly surprising. It will sound very strange in Miss Summerson's ears, I dare say, that we know nothing about chops in this house. But we don't, not the least. We can't cook anything whatever. A needle and thread

we don’t know how to use. We admire the people who possess the practical wisdom we want, but we don’t quarrel with them. Then why should they quarrel with us? Live and let live, we say to them. Live upon your practical wisdom, and let us live upon you!”

He laughed, but as usual seemed quite candid and really to mean what he said.

“We have sympathy, my roses,” said Mr. Skimpole, “sympathy for everything. Have we not?”

“Oh, yes, papa!” cried the three daughters.

“In fact, that is our family department,” said Mr. Skimpole, “in this hurly-burly of life. We are capable of looking on and of being interested, and we DO look on, and we ARE interested. What more can we do? Here is my Beauty daughter, married these three years. Now I dare say her marrying another child, and having two more, was all wrong in point of political economy, but it was very agreeable. We had our little festivities on those occasions and exchanged social ideas. She brought her young husband home one day, and they and their young fledglings have their nest upstairs. I dare say at some time or other Sentiment and Comedy will bring THEIR husbands home and have THEIR nests upstairs too. So we get on, we don’t know how, but somehow.”

She looked very young indeed to be the mother of two children, and I could not help pitying both her and them. It was evident that the three daughters had grown up as they could and had had just as little haphazard instruction as qualified them to be their father’s playthings in his idlest hours. His pictorial tastes were consulted, I observed, in their respective styles of wearing their hair, the Beauty daughter being in the classic manner, the Sentiment daughter luxuriant and flowing, and the Comedy daughter in the arch style, with a good deal of sprightly forehead, and vivacious little curls dotted about the corners of her eyes. They were dressed to correspond, though in a most untidy and negligent way.

Ada and I conversed with these young ladies and found them wonderfully like their father. In the meanwhile Mr. Jarndyce (who had been rubbing his head to a great extent, and hinted at a change in the wind) talked with Mrs. Skimpole in a corner, where we could not help hearing the chink of money. Mr. Skimpole had previously volunteered to go home with us and had withdrawn to dress himself for the purpose.

“My roses,” he said when he came back, “take care of mama. She is poorly to-day. By going home with Mr. Jarndyce for a day or two, I shall hear the larks sing and preserve my amiability. It has been tried, you know, and would be tried again if I remained at home.”

“That bad man!” said the Comedy daughter.

“At the very time when he knew papa was lying ill by his wallflowers, looking at the blue sky,” Laura complained.

“And when the smell of hay was in the air!” said Arethusa.

“It showed a want of poetry in the man,” Mr. Skimpole assented, but with perfect good humour. “It was coarse. There was an absence of the finer touches of humanity in it! My daughters have taken great offence,” he explained to us, “at an honest man—”

“Not honest, papa. Impossible!” they all three protested.

“At a rough kind of fellow—a sort of human hedgehog rolled up,” said Mr. Skimpole, “who is a baker in this neighbourhood and from whom we borrowed a couple of arm-chairs. We wanted a couple of arm-chairs, and we hadn’t got them, and therefore of course we looked to a man who HAD got them, to lend them. Well! This morose person lent them, and we wore them out. When they were worn out, he wanted them back. He had them back. He was contented, you will say. Not at all. He objected to their being worn. I reasoned with him, and pointed out his mistake. I said, ‘Can you, at your time of life, be so headstrong, my friend, as to persist that an arm-chair is a thing to put upon a shelf and look at? That it is an object to contemplate, to survey from a distance, to consider from a point of sight? Don’t you KNOW that these arm-chairs were borrowed to be sat upon?’ He was unreasonable and unpersuadable and used intemperate language. Being as patient as I am at this minute, I addressed another appeal to him. I said, ‘Now, my good man, however our business capacities may vary, we are all children of one great mother, Nature. On this blooming summer morning here you see me’ (I was on the sofa) ‘with flowers before me, fruit upon the table, the cloudless sky above me, the air full of fragrance, contemplating Nature. I entreat you, by our common brotherhood, not to interpose between me and a subject so sublime, the absurd figure of an angry baker!’ But he did,” said Mr. Skimpole, raising his laughing eyes in playful astonishment; “he did interpose that ridiculous figure, and he does, and he will again. And therefore I am very glad to get out of his way and to go

home with my friend Jarndyce.”

It seemed to escape his consideration that Mrs. Skimpole and the daughters remained behind to encounter the baker, but this was so old a story to all of them that it had become a matter of course. He took leave of his family with a tenderness as airy and graceful as any other aspect in which he showed himself and rode away with us in perfect harmony of mind. We had an opportunity of seeing through some open doors, as we went downstairs, that his own apartment was a palace to the rest of the house.

I could have no anticipation, and I had none, that something very startling to me at the moment, and ever memorable to me in what ensued from it, was to happen before this day was out. Our guest was in such spirits on the way home that I could do nothing but listen to him and wonder at him; nor was I alone in this, for Ada yielded to the same fascination. As to my guardian, the wind, which had threatened to become fixed in the east when we left Somers Town, veered completely round before we were a couple of miles from it.

Whether of questionable childishness or not in any other matters, Mr. Skimpole had a child’s enjoyment of change and bright weather. In no way wearied by his sallies on the road, he was in the drawing-room before any of us; and I heard him at the piano while I was yet looking after my housekeeping, singing refrains of barcaroles and drinking songs, Italian and German, by the score.

We were all assembled shortly before dinner, and he was still at the piano idly picking out in his luxurious way little strains of music, and talking between whiles of finishing some sketches of the ruined old Verulam wall to-morrow, which he had begun a year or two ago and had got tired of, when a card was brought in and my guardian read aloud in a surprised voice, “Sir Leicester Dedlock!”

The visitor was in the room while it was yet turning round with me and before I had the power to stir. If I had had it, I should have hurried away. I had not even the presence of mind, in my giddiness, to retire to Ada in the window, or to see the window, or to know where it was. I heard my name and found that my guardian was presenting me before I could move to a chair.

“Pray be seated, Sir Leicester.”

“Mr. Jarndyce,” said Sir Leicester in reply as he bowed and seated himself, “I do myself the honour of calling here—”

“You do ME the honour, Sir Leicester.”

“Thank you—of calling here on my road from Lincolnshire to express my regret that any cause of complaint, however strong, that I may have against a gentleman who—who is known to you and has been your host, and to whom therefore I will make no farther reference, should have prevented you, still more ladies under your escort and charge, from seeing whatever little there may be to gratify a polite and refined taste at my house, Chesney Wold.”

“You are exceedingly obliging, Sir Leicester, and on behalf of those ladies (who are present) and for myself, I thank you very much.”

“It is possible, Mr. Jarndyce, that the gentleman to whom, for the reasons I have mentioned, I refrain from making further allusion—it is possible, Mr. Jarndyce, that that gentleman may have done me the honour so far to misapprehend my character as to induce you to believe that you would not have been received by my local establishment in Lincolnshire with that urbanity, that courtesy, which its members are instructed to show to all ladies and gentlemen who present themselves at that house. I merely beg to observe, sir, that the fact is the reverse.”

My guardian delicately dismissed this remark without making any verbal answer.

“It has given me pain, Mr. Jarndyce,” Sir Leicester weightily proceeded. “I assure you, sir, it has given—me—pain—to learn from the housekeeper at Chesney Wold that a gentleman who was in your company in that part of the county, and who would appear to possess a cultivated taste for the fine arts, was likewise deterred by some such cause from examining the family pictures with that leisure, that attention, that care, which he might have desired to bestow upon them and which some of them might possibly have repaid.” Here he produced a card and read, with much gravity and a little trouble, through his eye-glass, “Mr. Hirrold—Herald—Harold—Skampling—Skumpling—I beg your pardon—Skimpole.”

“This is Mr. Harold Skimpole,” said my guardian, evidently surprised.

“Oh!” exclaimed Sir Leicester, “I am happy to meet Mr. Skimpole and to have the opportunity of tendering my personal regrets. I hope, sir, that when you again find yourself in my part of the county, you will be under no

similar sense of restraint."

"You are very obliging, Sir Leicester Dedlock. So encouraged, I shall certainly give myself the pleasure and advantage of another visit to your beautiful house. The owners of such places as Chesney Wold," said Mr. Skimpole with his usual happy and easy air, "are public benefactors. They are good enough to maintain a number of delightful objects for the admiration and pleasure of us poor men; and not to reap all the admiration and pleasure that they yield is to be ungrateful to our benefactors."

Sir Leicester seemed to approve of this sentiment highly. "An artist, sir?"

"No," returned Mr. Skimpole. "A perfectly idle man. A mere amateur."

Sir Leicester seemed to approve of this even more. He hoped he might have the good fortune to be at Chesney Wold when Mr. Skimpole next came down into Lincolnshire. Mr. Skimpole professed himself much flattered and honoured.

"Mr. Skimpole mentioned," pursued Sir Leicester, addressing himself again to my guardian, "mentioned to the housekeeper, who, as he may have observed, is an old and attached retainer of the family—"

("That is, when I walked through the house the other day, on the occasion of my going down to visit Miss Summerson and Miss Clare," Mr. Skimpole airily explained to us.)

"—That the friend with whom he had formerly been staying there was Mr. Jarndyce." Sir Leicester bowed to the bearer of that name. "And hence I became aware of the circumstance for which I have professed my regret. That this should have occurred to any gentleman, Mr. Jarndyce, but especially a gentleman formerly known to Lady Dedlock, and indeed claiming some distant connexion with her, and for whom (as I learn from my Lady herself) she entertains a high respect, does, I assure you, give—me—pain."

"Pray say no more about it, Sir Leicester," returned my guardian. "I am very sensible, as I am sure we all are, of your consideration. Indeed the mistake was mine, and I ought to apologize for it."

I had not once looked up. I had not seen the visitor and had not even appeared to myself to hear the conversation. It surprises me to find that I can recall it, for it seemed to make no impression on me as it passed. I heard them speaking, but my mind was so confused and my instinctive avoidance of this gentleman made his presence so distressing to me that I

thought I understood nothing, through the rushing in my head and the beating of my heart.

"I mentioned the subject to Lady Dedlock," said Sir Leicester, rising, "and my Lady informed me that she had had the pleasure of exchanging a few words with Mr. Jarndyce and his wards on the occasion of an accidental meeting during their sojourn in the vicinity. Permit me, Mr. Jarndyce, to repeat to yourself, and to these ladies, the assurance I have already tendered to Mr. Skimpole. Circumstances undoubtedly prevent my saying that it would afford me any gratification to hear that Mr. Boythorn had favoured my house with his presence, but those circumstances are confined to that gentleman himself and do not extend beyond him."

"You know my old opinion of him," said Mr. Skimpole, lightly appealing to us. "An amiable bull who is determined to make every colour scarlet!"

Sir Leicester Dedlock coughed as if he could not possibly hear another word in reference to such an individual and took his leave with great ceremony and politeness. I got to my own room with all possible speed and remained there until I had recovered my self-command. It had been very much disturbed, but I was thankful to find when I went downstairs again that they only rallied me for having been shy and mute before the great Lincolnshire baronet.

By that time I had made up my mind that the period was come when I must tell my guardian what I knew. The possibility of my being brought into contact with my mother, of my being taken to her house, even of Mr. Skimpole's, however distantly associated with me, receiving kindnesses and obligations from her husband, was so painful that I felt I could no longer guide myself without his assistance.

When we had retired for the night, and Ada and I had had our usual talk in our pretty room, I went out at my door again and sought my guardian among his books. I knew he always read at that hour, and as I drew near I saw the light shining out into the passage from his reading-lamp.

"May I come in, guardian?"

"Surely, little woman. What's the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter. I thought I would like to take this quiet time of saying a word to you about myself."

He put a chair for me, shut his book, and put it by, and turned his kind

attentive face towards me. I could not help observing that it wore that curious expression I had observed in it once before—on that night when he had said that he was in no trouble which I could readily understand.

"What concerns you, my dear Esther," said he, "concerns us all. You cannot be more ready to speak than I am to hear."

"I know that, guardian. But I have such need of your advice and support. Oh! You don't know how much need I have to-night."

He looked unprepared for my being so earnest, and even a little alarmed.

"Or how anxious I have been to speak to you," said I, "ever since the visitor was here to-day."

"The visitor, my dear! Sir Leicester Dedlock?"

"Yes."

He folded his arms and sat looking at me with an air of the profoundest astonishment, awaiting what I should say next. I did not know how to prepare him.

"Why, Esther," said he, breaking into a smile, "our visitor and you are the two last persons on earth I should have thought of connecting together!"

"Oh, yes, guardian, I know it. And I too, but a little while ago."

The smile passed from his face, and he became graver than before. He crossed to the door to see that it was shut (but I had seen to that) and resumed his seat before me.

"Guardian," said I, "do you remember, when we were overtaken by the thunder-storm, Lady Dedlock's speaking to you of her sister?"

"Of course. Of course I do."

"And reminding you that she and her sister had differed, had gone their several ways?"

"Of course."

"Why did they separate, guardian?"

His face quite altered as he looked at me. "My child, what questions are these! I never knew. No one but themselves ever did know, I believe. Who could tell what the secrets of those two handsome and proud women were! You have seen Lady Dedlock. If you had ever seen her sister, you would know her to have been as resolute and haughty as she."

"Oh, guardian, I have seen her many and many a time!"

"Seen her?"

He paused a little, biting his lip. "Then, Esther, when you spoke to me

long ago of Boythorn, and when I told you that he was all but married once, and that the lady did not die, but died to him, and that that time had had its influence on his later life—did you know it all, and know who the lady was?"

"No, guardian," I returned, fearful of the light that dimly broke upon me. "Nor do I know yet."

"Lady Dedlock's sister."

"And why," I could scarcely ask him, "why, guardian, pray tell me why were THEY parted?"

"It was her act, and she kept its motives in her inflexible heart. He afterwards did conjecture (but it was mere conjecture) that some injury which her haughty spirit had received in her cause of quarrel with her sister had wounded her beyond all reason, but she wrote him that from the date of that letter she died to him—as in literal truth she did—and that the resolution was exacted from her by her knowledge of his proud temper and his strained sense of honour, which were both her nature too. In consideration for those master points in him, and even in consideration for them in herself, she made the sacrifice, she said, and would live in it and die in it. She did both, I fear; certainly he never saw her, never heard of her from that hour. Nor did any one."

"Oh, guardian, what have I done!" I cried, giving way to my grief; "what sorrow have I innocently caused!"

"You caused, Esther?"

"Yes, guardian. Innocently, but most surely. That secluded sister is my first remembrance."

"No, no!" he cried, starting.

"Yes, guardian, yes! And HER sister is my mother!"

I would have told him all my mother's letter, but he would not hear it then. He spoke so tenderly and wisely to me, and he put so plainly before me all I had myself imperfectly thought and hoped in my better state of mind, that, penetrated as I had been with fervent gratitude towards him through so many years, I believed I had never loved him so dearly, never thanked him in my heart so fully, as I did that night. And when he had taken me to my room and kissed me at the door, and when at last I lay down to sleep, my thought was how could I ever be busy enough, how could I ever be good enough, how in my little way could I ever hope to be forgetful

enough of myself, devoted enough to him, and useful enough to others, to show him how I blessed and honoured him.

CHAPTER XLIV

The Letter and the Answer

MY GUARDIAN CALLED ME into his room next morning, and then I told him what had been left untold on the previous night. There was nothing to be done, he said, but to keep the secret and to avoid another such encounter as that of yesterday. He understood my feeling and entirely shared it. He charged himself even with restraining Mr. Skimpole from improving his opportunity. One person whom he need not name to me, it was not now possible for him to advise or help. He wished it were, but no such thing could be. If her mistrust of the lawyer whom she had mentioned were well-founded, which he scarcely doubted, he dreaded discovery. He knew something of him, both by sight and by reputation, and it was certain that he was a dangerous man. Whatever happened, he repeatedly impressed upon me with anxious affection and kindness, I was as innocent of as himself and as unable to influence.

"Nor do I understand," said he, "that any doubts tend towards you, my dear. Much suspicion may exist without that connexion."

"With the lawyer," I returned. "But two other persons have come into my mind since I have been anxious. Then I told him all about Mr. Guppy, who I feared might have had his vague surmises when I little understood his meaning, but in whose silence after our last interview I expressed perfect confidence.

"Well," said my guardian. "Then we may dismiss him for the present. Who is the other?"

I called to his recollection the French maid and the eager offer of herself she had made to me.

"Ha!" he returned thoughtfully. "That is a more alarming person than the clerk. But after all, my dear, it was but seeking for a new service. She had seen you and Ada a little while before, and it was natural that you should come into her head. She merely proposed herself for your maid, you know. She did nothing more."

“Her manner was strange,” said I.

“Yes, and her manner was strange when she took her shoes off and showed that cool relish for a walk that might have ended in her death-bed,” said my guardian. “It would be useless self-distress and torment to reckon up such chances and possibilities. There are very few harmless circumstances that would not seem full of perilous meaning, so considered. Be hopeful, little woman. You can be nothing better than yourself; be that, through this knowledge, as you were before you had it. It is the best you can do for everybody’s sake. I, sharing the secret with you—”

“And lightening it, guardian, so much,” said I.

“—will be attentive to what passes in that family, so far as I can observe it from my distance. And if the time should come when I can stretch out a hand to render the least service to one whom it is better not to name even here, I will not fail to do it for her dear daughter’s sake.”

I thanked him with my whole heart. What could I ever do but thank him! I was going out at the door when he asked me to stay a moment. Quickly turning round, I saw that same expression on his face again; and all at once, I don’t know how, it flashed upon me as a new and far-off possibility that I understood it.

“My dear Esther,” said my guardian, “I have long had something in my thoughts that I have wished to say to you.”

“Indeed?”

“I have had some difficulty in approaching it, and I still have. I should wish it to be so deliberately said, and so deliberately considered. Would you object to my writing it?”

“Dear guardian, how could I object to your writing anything for ME to read?”

“Then see, my love,” said he with his cheery smile, “am I at this moment quite as plain and easy—do I seem as open, as honest and old-fashioned—as I am at any time?”

I answered in all earnestness, “Quite.” With the strictest truth, for his momentary hesitation was gone (it had not lasted a minute), and his fine, sensible, cordial, sterling manner was restored.

“Do I look as if I suppressed anything, meant anything but what I said, had any reservation at all, no matter what?” said he with his bright clear eyes on mine.

I answered, most assuredly he did not.

"Can you fully trust me, and thoroughly rely on what I profess, Esther?"

"Most thoroughly," said I with my whole heart.

"My dear girl," returned my guardian, "give me your hand."

He took it in his, holding me lightly with his arm, and looking down into my face with the same genuine freshness and faithfulness of manner—the old protecting manner which had made that house my home in a moment—said, "You have wrought changes in me, little woman, since the winter day in the stage-coach. First and last you have done me a world of good since that time."

"Ah, guardian, what have you done for me since that time!"

"But," said he, "that is not to be remembered now."

"It never can be forgotten."

"Yes, Esther," said he with a gentle seriousness, "it is to be forgotten now, to be forgotten for a while. You are only to remember now that nothing can change me as you know me. Can you feel quite assured of that, my dear?"

"I can, and I do," I said.

"That's much," he answered. "That's everything. But I must not take that at a word. I will not write this something in my thoughts until you have quite resolved within yourself that nothing can change me as you know me. If you doubt that in the least degree, I will never write it. If you are sure of that, on good consideration, send Charley to me this night week—'for the letter.' But if you are not quite certain, never send. Mind, I trust to your truth, in this thing as in everything. If you are not quite certain on that one point, never send!"

"Guardian," said I, "I am already certain, I can no more be changed in that conviction than you can be changed towards me. I shall send Charley for the letter."

He shook my hand and said no more. Nor was any more said in reference to this conversation, either by him or me, through the whole week. When the appointed night came, I said to Charley as soon as I was alone, "Go and knock at Mr. Jarndyce's door, Charley, and say you have come from me—'for the letter.'" Charley went up the stairs, and down the stairs, and along the passages—the zig-zag way about the old-fashioned house seemed very long in my listening ears that night—and so came back,

along the passages, and down the stairs, and up the stairs, and brought the letter. “Lay it on the table, Charley,” said I. So Charley laid it on the table and went to bed, and I sat looking at it without taking it up, thinking of many things.

I began with my overshadowed childhood, and passed through those timid days to the heavy time when my aunt lay dead, with her resolute face so cold and set, and when I was more solitary with Mrs. Rachael than if I had had no one in the world to speak to or to look at. I passed to the altered days when I was so blest as to find friends in all around me, and to be beloved. I came to the time when I first saw my dear girl and was received into that sisterly affection which was the grace and beauty of my life. I recalled the first bright gleam of welcome which had shone out of those very windows upon our expectant faces on that cold bright night, and which had never paled. I lived my happy life there over again, I went through my illness and recovery, I thought of myself so altered and of those around me so unchanged; and all this happiness shone like a light from one central figure, represented before me by the letter on the table.

I opened it and read it. It was so impressive in its love for me, and in the unselfish caution it gave me, and the consideration it showed for me in every word, that my eyes were too often blinded to read much at a time. But I read it through three times before I laid it down. I had thought beforehand that I knew its purport, and I did. It asked me, would I be the mistress of Bleak House.

It was not a love letter, though it expressed so much love, but was written just as he would at any time have spoken to me. I saw his face, and heard his voice, and felt the influence of his kind protecting manner in every line. It addressed me as if our places were reversed, as if all the good deeds had been mine and all the feelings they had awakened his. It dwelt on my being young, and he past the prime of life; on his having attained a ripe age, while I was a child; on his writing to me with a silvered head, and knowing all this so well as to set it in full before me for mature deliberation. It told me that I would gain nothing by such a marriage and lose nothing by rejecting it, for no new relation could enhance the tenderness in which he held me, and whatever my decision was, he was certain it would be right. But he had considered this step anew since our late confidence and had decided on taking it, if it only served to show me through one poor instance

that the whole world would readily unite to falsify the stern prediction of my childhood. I was the last to know what happiness I could bestow upon him, but of that he said no more, for I was always to remember that I owed him nothing and that he was my debtor, and for very much. He had often thought of our future, and foreseeing that the time must come, and fearing that it might come soon, when Ada (now very nearly of age) would leave us, and when our present mode of life must be broken up, had become accustomed to reflect on this proposal. Thus he made it. If I felt that I could ever give him the best right he could have to be my protector, and if I felt that I could happily and justly become the dear companion of his remaining life, superior to all lighter chances and changes than death, even then he could not have me bind myself irrevocably while this letter was yet so new to me, but even then I must have ample time for reconsideration. In that case, or in the opposite case, let him be unchanged in his old relation, in his old manner, in the old name by which I called him. And as to his bright Dame Durden and little housekeeper, she would ever be the same, he knew.

This was the substance of the letter, written throughout with a justice and a dignity as if he were indeed my responsible guardian impartially representing the proposal of a friend against whom in his integrity he stated the full case.

But he did not hint to me that when I had been better looking he had had this same proceeding in his thoughts and had refrained from it. That when my old face was gone from me, and I had no attractions, he could love me just as well as in my fairer days. That the discovery of my birth gave him no shock. That his generosity rose above my disfigurement and my inheritance of shame. That the more I stood in need of such fidelity, the more firmly I might trust in him to the last.

But I knew it, I knew it well now. It came upon me as the close of the benignant history I had been pursuing, and I felt that I had but one thing to do. To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly, and what had I wished for the other night but some new means of thanking him?

Still I cried very much, not only in the fullness of my heart after reading the letter, not only in the strangeness of the prospect—for it was strange though I had expected the contents—but as if something for which there was no name or distinct idea were indefinitely lost to me. I was very happy, very thankful, very hopeful; but I cried very much.

By and by I went to my old glass. My eyes were red and swollen, and I said, “Oh, Esther, Esther, can that be you!” I am afraid the face in the glass was going to cry again at this reproach, but I held up my finger at it, and it stopped.

“That is more like the composed look you comforted me with, my dear, when you showed me such a change!” said I, beginning to let down my hair. “When you are mistress of Bleak House, you are to be as cheerful as a bird. In fact, you are always to be cheerful; so let us begin for once and for all.”

I went on with my hair now, quite comfortably. I sobbed a little still, but that was because I had been crying, not because I was crying then.

“And so Esther, my dear, you are happy for life. Happy with your best friends, happy in your old home, happy in the power of doing a great deal of good, and happy in the undeserved love of the best of men.”

I thought, all at once, if my guardian had married some one else, how should I have felt, and what should I have done! That would have been a change indeed. It presented my life in such a new and blank form that I rang my housekeeping keys and gave them a kiss before I laid them down in their basket again.

Then I went on to think, as I dressed my hair before the glass, how often had I considered within myself that the deep traces of my illness and the circumstances of my birth were only new reasons why I should be busy, busy, busy—useful, amiable, serviceable, in all honest, unpretending ways. This was a good time, to be sure, to sit down morbidly and cry! As to its seeming at all strange to me at first (if that were any excuse for crying, which it was not) that I was one day to be the mistress of Bleak House, why should it seem strange? Other people had thought of such things, if I had not. “Don’t you remember, my plain dear,” I asked myself, looking at the glass, “what Mrs. Woodcourt said before those scars were there about your marrying—”

Perhaps the name brought them to my remembrance. The dried remains of the flowers. It would be better not to keep them now. They had only been preserved in memory of something wholly past and gone, but it would be better not to keep them now.

They were in a book, and it happened to be in the next room—our sitting-room, dividing Ada’s chamber from mine. I took a candle and went

softly in to fetch it from its shelf. After I had it in my hand, I saw my beautiful darling, through the open door, lying asleep, and I stole in to kiss her.

It was weak in me, I know, and I could have no reason for crying; but I dropped a tear upon her dear face, and another, and another. Weaker than that, I took the withered flowers out and put them for a moment to her lips. I thought about her love for Richard, though, indeed, the flowers had nothing to do with that. Then I took them into my own room and burned them at the candle, and they were dust in an instant.

On entering the breakfast-room next morning, I found my guardian just as usual, quite as frank, as open, and free. There being not the least constraint in his manner, there was none (or I think there was none) in mine. I was with him several times in the course of the morning, in and out, when there was no one there, and I thought it not unlikely that he might speak to me about the letter, but he did not say a word.

So, on the next morning, and the next, and for at least a week, over which time Mr. Skimpole prolonged his stay. I expected, every day, that my guardian might speak to me about the letter, but he never did.

I thought then, growing uneasy, that I ought to write an answer. I tried over and over again in my own room at night, but I could not write an answer that at all began like a good answer, so I thought each night I would wait one more day. And I waited seven more days, and he never said a word.

At last, Mr. Skimpole having departed, we three were one afternoon going out for a ride; and I, being dressed before Ada and going down, came upon my guardian, with his back towards me, standing at the drawing-room window looking out.

He turned on my coming in and said, smiling, “Aye, it’s you, little woman, is it?” and looked out again.

I had made up my mind to speak to him now. In short, I had come down on purpose. “Guardian,” I said, rather hesitating and trembling, “when would you like to have the answer to the letter Charley came for?”

“When it’s ready, my dear,” he replied.

“I think it is ready,” said I.

“Is Charley to bring it?” he asked pleasantly.

“No. I have brought it myself, guardian,” I returned.

I put my two arms round his neck and kissed him, and he said was this the mistress of Bleak House, and I said yes; and it made no difference presently, and we all went out together, and I said nothing to my precious pet about it.

CHAPTER XLV

In Trust

ONE MORNING WHEN I had done jingling about with my baskets of keys, as my beauty and I were walking round and round the garden I happened to turn my eyes towards the house and saw a long thin shadow going in which looked like Mr. Vholes. Ada had been telling me only that morning of her hopes that Richard might exhaust his ardour in the Chancery suit by being so very earnest in it; and therefore, not to damp my dear girl's spirits, I said nothing about Mr. Vholes's shadow.

Presently came Charley, lightly winding among the bushes and tripping along the paths, as rosy and pretty as one of Flora's attendants instead of my maid, saying, "Oh, if you please, miss, would you step and speak to Mr. Jarndyce!"

It was one of Charley's peculiarities that whenever she was charged with a message she always began to deliver it as soon as she beheld, at any distance, the person for whom it was intended. Therefore I saw Charley asking me in her usual form of words to "step and speak" to Mr. Jarndyce long before I heard her. And when I did hear her, she had said it so often that she was out of breath.

I told Ada I would make haste back and inquired of Charley as we went in whether there was not a gentleman with Mr. Jarndyce. To which Charley, whose grammar, I confess to my shame, never did any credit to my educational powers, replied, "Yes, miss. Him as come down in the country with Mr. Richard."

A more complete contrast than my guardian and Mr. Vholes I suppose there could not be. I found them looking at one another across a table, the one so open and the other so close, the one so broad and upright and the other so narrow and stooping, the one giving out what he had to say in such a rich ringing voice and the other keeping it in in such a cold-blooded, gasping, fish-like manner that I thought I never had seen two people so unmatched.

“You know Mr. Vholes, my dear,” said my guardian. Not with the greatest urbanity, I must say.

Mr. Vholes rose, gloved and buttoned up as usual, and seated himself again, just as he had seated himself beside Richard in the gig. Not having Richard to look at, he looked straight before him.

“Mr. Vholes,” said my guardian, eyeing his black figure as if he were a bird of ill omen, “has brought an ugly report of our most unfortunate Rick.” Laying a marked emphasis on “most unfortunate” as if the words were rather descriptive of his connexion with Mr. Vholes.

I sat down between them; Mr. Vholes remained immovable, except that he secretly picked at one of the red pimples on his yellow face with his black glove.

“And as Rick and you are happily good friends, I should like to know,” said my guardian, “what you think, my dear. Would you be so good as to—as to speak up, Mr. Vholes?”

Doing anything but that, Mr. Vholes observed, “I have been saying that I have reason to know, Miss Summerson, as Mr. C.’s professional adviser, that Mr. C.’s circumstances are at the present moment in an embarrassed state. Not so much in point of amount as owing to the peculiar and pressing nature of liabilities Mr. C. has incurred and the means he has of liquidating or meeting the same. I have staved off many little matters for Mr. C., but there is a limit to staving off, and we have reached it. I have made some advances out of pocket to accommodate these unpleasantnesses, but I necessarily look to being repaid, for I do not pretend to be a man of capital, and I have a father to support in the Vale of Taunton, besides striving to realize some little independence for three dear girls at home. My apprehension is, Mr. C.’s circumstances being such, lest it should end in his obtaining leave to part with his commission, which at all events is desirable to be made known to his connexions.”

Mr. Vholes, who had looked at me while speaking, here emerged into the silence he could hardly be said to have broken, so stifled was his tone, and looked before him again.

“Imagine the poor fellow without even his present resource,” said my guardian to me. “Yet what can I do? You know him, Esther. He would never accept of help from me now. To offer it or hint at it would be to drive him to an extremity, if nothing else did.”

Mr. Vholes hereupon addressed me again.

“What Mr. Jarndyce remarks, miss, is no doubt the case, and is the difficulty. I do not see that anything is to be done. I do not say that anything is to be done. Far from it. I merely come down here under the seal of confidence and mention it in order that everything may be openly carried on and that it may not be said afterwards that everything was not openly carried on. My wish is that everything should be openly carried on. I desire to leave a good name behind me. If I consulted merely my own interests with Mr. C., I should not be here. So insurmountable, as you must well know, would be his objections. This is not a professional attendance. This can he charged to nobody. I have no interest in it except as a member of society and a father—AND a son,” said Mr. Vholes, who had nearly forgotten that point.

It appeared to us that Mr. Vholes said neither more nor less than the truth in intimating that he sought to divide the responsibility, such as it was, of knowing Richard’s situation. I could only suggest that I should go down to Deal, where Richard was then stationed, and see him, and try if it were possible to avert the worst. Without consulting Mr. Vholes on this point, I took my guardian aside to propose it, while Mr. Vholes gauntly stalked to the fire and warmed his funeral gloves.

The fatigue of the journey formed an immediate objection on my guardian’s part, but as I saw he had no other, and as I was only too happy to go, I got his consent. We had then merely to dispose of Mr. Vholes.

“Well, sir,” said Mr. Jarndyce, “Miss Summerson will communicate with Mr. Carstone, and you can only hope that his position may be yet retrievable. You will allow me to order you lunch after your journey, sir.”

“I thank you, Mr. Jarndyce,” said Mr. Vholes, putting out his long black sleeve to check the ringing of the bell, “not any. I thank you, no, not a morsel. My digestion is much impaired, and I am but a poor knife and fork at any time. If I was to partake of solid food at this period of the day, I don’t know what the consequences might be. Everything having been openly carried on, sir, I will now with your permission take my leave.”

“And I would that you could take your leave, and we could all take our leave, Mr. Vholes,” returned my guardian bitterly, “of a cause you know of.”

Mr. Vholes, whose black dye was so deep from head to foot that it had

quite steamed before the fire, diffusing a very unpleasant perfume, made a short one-sided inclination of his head from the neck and slowly shook it.

"We whose ambition it is to be looked upon in the light of respectable practitioners, sir, can but put our shoulders to the wheel. We do it, sir. At least, I do it myself; and I wish to think well of my professional brethren, one and all. You are sensible of an obligation not to refer to me, miss, in communicating with Mr. C.?"

I said I would be careful not to do it.

"Just so, miss. Good morning. Mr. Jarndyce, good morning, sir." Mr. Vholes put his dead glove, which scarcely seemed to have any hand in it, on my fingers, and then on my guardian's fingers, and took his long thin shadow away. I thought of it on the outside of the coach, passing over all the sunny landscape between us and London, chilling the seed in the ground as it glided along.

Of course it became necessary to tell Ada where I was going and why I was going, and of course she was anxious and distressed. But she was too true to Richard to say anything but words of pity and words of excuse, and in a more loving spirit still—my dear devoted girl!—she wrote him a long letter, of which I took charge.

Charley was to be my travelling companion, though I am sure I wanted none and would willingly have left her at home. We all went to London that afternoon, and finding two places in the mail, secured them. At our usual bed-time, Charley and I were rolling away seaward with the Kentish letters.

It was a night's journey in those coach times, but we had the mail to ourselves and did not find the night very tedious. It passed with me as I suppose it would with most people under such circumstances. At one while my journey looked hopeful, and at another hopeless. Now I thought I should do some good, and now I wondered how I could ever have supposed so. Now it seemed one of the most reasonable things in the world that I should have come, and now one of the most unreasonable. In what state I should find Richard, what I should say to him, and what he would say to me occupied my mind by turns with these two states of feeling; and the wheels seemed to play one tune (to which the burden of my guardian's letter set itself) over and over again all night.

At last we came into the narrow streets of Deal, and very gloomy they were upon a raw misty morning. The long flat beach, with its little irregular

houses, wooden and brick, and its litter of capstans, and great boats, and sheds, and bare upright poles with tackle and blocks, and loose gravelly waste places overgrown with grass and weeds, wore as dull an appearance as any place I ever saw. The sea was heaving under a thick white fog; and nothing else was moving but a few early ropemakers, who, with the yarn twisted round their bodies, looked as if, tired of their present state of existence, they were spinning themselves into cordage.

But when we got into a warm room in an excellent hotel and sat down, comfortably washed and dressed, to an early breakfast (for it was too late to think of going to bed), Deal began to look more cheerful. Our little room was like a ship's cabin, and that delighted Charley very much. Then the fog began to rise like a curtain, and numbers of ships that we had had no idea were near appeared. I don't know how many sail the waiter told us were then lying in the downs. Some of these vessels were of grand size—one was a large Indiaman just come home; and when the sun shone through the clouds, making silvery pools in the dark sea, the way in which these ships brightened, and shadowed, and changed, amid a bustle of boats pulling off from the shore to them and from them to the shore, and a general life and motion in themselves and everything around them, was most beautiful.

The large Indiaman was our great attraction because she had come into the downs in the night. She was surrounded by boats, and we said how glad the people on board of her must be to come ashore. Charley was curious, too, about the voyage, and about the heat in India, and the serpents and the tigers; and as she picked up such information much faster than grammar, I told her what I knew on those points. I told her, too, how people in such voyages were sometimes wrecked and cast on rocks, where they were saved by the intrepidity and humanity of one man. And Charley asking how that could be, I told her how we knew at home of such a case.

I had thought of sending Richard a note saying I was there, but it seemed so much better to go to him without preparation. As he lived in barracks I was a little doubtful whether this was feasible, but we went out to reconnoitre. Peeping in at the gate of the barrack-yard, we found everything very quiet at that time in the morning, and I asked a sergeant standing on the guardhouse-steps where he lived. He sent a man before to show me, who went up some bare stairs, and knocked with his knuckles at a door, and left us.

“Now then!” cried Richard from within. So I left Charley in the little passage, and going on to the half-open door, said, “Can I come in, Richard? It’s only Dame Durden.”

He was writing at a table, with a great confusion of clothes, tin cases, books, boots, brushes, and portmanteaus strewn all about the floor. He was only half dressed—in plain clothes, I observed, not in uniform—and his hair was unbrushed, and he looked as wild as his room. All this I saw after he had heartily welcomed me and I was seated near him, for he started upon hearing my voice and caught me in his arms in a moment. Dear Richard! He was ever the same to me. Down to—ah, poor poor fellow!—to the end, he never received me but with something of his old merry boyish manner.

“Good heaven, my dear little woman,” said he, “how do you come here? Who could have thought of seeing you! Nothing the matter? Ada is well?”

“Quite well. Lovelier than ever, Richard!”

“Ah!” he said, leaning back in his chair. “My poor cousin! I was writing to you, Esther.”

So worn and haggard as he looked, even in the fullness of his handsome youth, leaning back in his chair and crushing the closely written sheet of paper in his hand!

“Have you been at the trouble of writing all that, and am I not to read it after all?” I asked.

“Oh, my dear,” he returned with a hopeless gesture. “You may read it in the whole room. It is all over here.”

I mildly entreated him not to be despondent. I told him that I had heard by chance of his being in difficulty and had come to consult with him what could best be done.

“Like you, Esther, but useless, and so NOT like you!” said he with a melancholy smile. “I am away on leave this day—should have been gone in another hour—and that is to smooth it over, for my selling out. Well! Let bygones be bygones. So this calling follows the rest. I only want to have been in the church to have made the round of all the professions.”

“Richard,” I urged, “it is not so hopeless as that?”

“Esther,” he returned, “it is indeed. I am just so near disgrace as that those who are put in authority over me (as the catechism goes) would far rather be without me than with me. And they are right. Apart from debts and duns and all such drawbacks, I am not fit even for this employment. I

have no care, no mind, no heart, no soul, but for one thing. Why, if this bubble hadn't broken now," he said, tearing the letter he had written into fragments and moodily casting them away, by driblets, "how could I have gone abroad? I must have been ordered abroad, but how could I have gone? How could I, with my experience of that thing, trust even Vholes unless I was at his back!"

I suppose he knew by my face what I was about to say, but he caught the hand I had laid upon his arm and touched my own lips with it to prevent me from going on.

"No, Dame Durden! Two subjects I forbid—must forbid. The first is John Jarndyce. The second, you know what. Call it madness, and I tell you I can't help it now, and can't be sane. But it is no such thing; it is the one object I have to pursue. It is a pity I ever was prevailed upon to turn out of my road for any other. It would be wisdom to abandon it now, after all the time, anxiety, and pains I have bestowed upon it! Oh, yes, true wisdom. It would be very agreeable, too, to some people; but I never will."

He was in that mood in which I thought it best not to increase his determination (if anything could increase it) by opposing him. I took out Ada's letter and put it in his hand.

"Am I to read it now?" he asked.

As I told him yes, he laid it on the table, and resting his head upon his hand, began. He had not read far when he rested his head upon his two hands—to hide his face from me. In a little while he rose as if the light were bad and went to the window. He finished reading it there, with his back towards me, and after he had finished and had folded it up, stood there for some minutes with the letter in his hand. When he came back to his chair, I saw tears in his eyes.

"Of course, Esther, you know what she says here?" He spoke in a softened voice and kissed the letter as he asked me.

"Yes, Richard."

"Offers me," he went on, tapping his foot upon the floor, "the little inheritance she is certain of so soon—just as little and as much as I have wasted—and begs and prays me to take it, set myself right with it, and remain in the service."

"I know your welfare to be the dearest wish of her heart," said I. "And, oh, my dear Richard, Ada's is a noble heart."

“I am sure it is. I—I wish I was dead!”

He went back to the window, and laying his arm across it, leaned his head down on his arm. It greatly affected me to see him so, but I hoped he might become more yielding, and I remained silent. My experience was very limited; I was not at all prepared for his rousing himself out of this emotion to a new sense of injury.

“And this is the heart that the same John Jarndyce, who is not otherwise to be mentioned between us, stepped in to estrange from me,” said he indignantly. “And the dear girl makes me this generous offer from under the same John Jarndyce’s roof, and with the same John Jarndyce’s gracious consent and connivance, I dare say, as a new means of buying me off.”

“Richard!” I cried out, rising hastily. “I will not hear you say such shameful words!” I was very angry with him indeed, for the first time in my life, but it only lasted a moment. When I saw his worn young face looking at me as if he were sorry, I put my hand on his shoulder and said, “If you please, my dear Richard, do not speak in such a tone to me. Consider!”

He blamed himself exceedingly and told me in the most generous manner that he had been very wrong and that he begged my pardon a thousand times. At that I laughed, but trembled a little too, for I was rather fluttered after being so fiery.

“To accept this offer, my dear Esther,” said he, sitting down beside me and resuming our conversation, “—once more, pray, pray forgive me; I am deeply grieved—to accept my dearest cousin’s offer is, I need not say, impossible. Besides, I have letters and papers that I could show you which would convince you it is all over here. I have done with the red coat, believe me. But it is some satisfaction, in the midst of my troubles and perplexities, to know that I am pressing Ada’s interests in pressing my own. Vholes has his shoulder to the wheel, and he cannot help urging it on as much for her as for me, thank God!”

His sanguine hopes were rising within him and lighting up his features, but they made his face more sad to me than it had been before.

“No, no!” cried Richard exultingly. “If every farthing of Ada’s little fortune were mine, no part of it should be spent in retaining me in what I am not fit for, can take no interest in, and am weary of. It should be devoted to what promises a better return, and should be used where she has a larger stake. Don’t be uneasy for me! I shall now have only one thing on my mind,

and Vholes and I will work it. I shall not be without means. Free of my commission, I shall be able to compound with some small usurers who will hear of nothing but their bond now—Vholes says so. I should have a balance in my favour anyway, but that would swell it. Come, come! You shall carry a letter to Ada from me, Esther, and you must both of you be more hopeful of me and not believe that I am quite cast away just yet, my dear."

I will not repeat what I said to Richard. I know it was tiresome, and nobody is to suppose for a moment that it was at all wise. It only came from my heart. He heard it patiently and feelingly, but I saw that on the two subjects he had reserved it was at present hopeless to make any representation to him. I saw too, and had experienced in this very interview, the sense of my guardian's remark that it was even more mischievous to use persuasion with him than to leave him as he was.

Therefore I was driven at last to asking Richard if he would mind convincing me that it really was all over there, as he had said, and that it was not his mere impression. He showed me without hesitation a correspondence making it quite plain that his retirement was arranged. I found, from what he told me, that Mr. Vholes had copies of these papers and had been in consultation with him throughout. Beyond ascertaining this, and having been the bearer of Ada's letter, and being (as I was going to be) Richard's companion back to London, I had done no good by coming down. Admitting this to myself with a reluctant heart, I said I would return to the hotel and wait until he joined me there, so he threw a cloak over his shoulders and saw me to the gate, and Charley and I went back along the beach.

There was a concourse of people in one spot, surrounding some naval officers who were landing from a boat, and pressing about them with unusual interest. I said to Charley this would be one of the great Indiaman's boats now, and we stopped to look.

The gentlemen came slowly up from the waterside, speaking good-humouredly to each other and to the people around and glancing about them as if they were glad to be in England again. "Charley, Charley," said I, "come away!" And I hurried on so swiftly that my little maid was surprised.

It was not until we were shut up in our cabin-room and I had had time to take breath that I began to think why I had made such haste. In one of the

sunburnt faces I had recognized Mr. Allan Woodcourt, and I had been afraid of his recognizing me. I had been unwilling that he should see my altered looks. I had been taken by surprise, and my courage had quite failed me.

But I knew this would not do, and I now said to myself, “My dear, there is no reason—there is and there can be no reason at all—why it should be worse for you now than it ever has been. What you were last month, you are to-day; you are no worse, you are no better. This is not your resolution; call it up, Esther, call it up!” I was in a great tremble—with running—and at first was quite unable to calm myself; but I got better, and I was very glad to know it.

The party came to the hotel. I heard them speaking on the staircase. I was sure it was the same gentlemen because I knew their voices again—I mean I knew Mr. Woodcourt’s. It would still have been a great relief to me to have gone away without making myself known, but I was determined not to do so. “No, my dear, no. No, no, no!”

I untied my bonnet and put my veil half up—I think I mean half down, but it matters very little—and wrote on one of my cards that I happened to be there with Mr. Richard Carstone, and I sent it in to Mr. Woodcourt. He came immediately. I told him I was rejoiced to be by chance among the first to welcome him home to England. And I saw that he was very sorry for me.

“You have been in shipwreck and peril since you left us, Mr. Woodcourt,” said I, “but we can hardly call that a misfortune which enabled you to be so useful and so brave. We read of it with the truest interest. It first came to my knowledge through your old patient, poor Miss Flite, when I was recovering from my severe illness.”

“Ah! Little Miss Flite!” he said. “She lives the same life yet?”

“Just the same.”

I was so comfortable with myself now as not to mind the veil and to be able to put it aside.

“Her gratitude to you, Mr. Woodcourt, is delightful. She is a most affectionate creature, as I have reason to say.”

“You—you have found her so?” he returned. “I—I am glad of that.” He was so very sorry for me that he could scarcely speak.

“I assure you,” said I, “that I was deeply touched by her sympathy and pleasure at the time I have referred to.”

“I was grieved to hear that you had been very ill.”

“I was very ill.”

“But you have quite recovered?”

“I have quite recovered my health and my cheerfulness,” said I. “You know how good my guardian is and what a happy life we lead, and I have everything to be thankful for and nothing in the world to desire.”

I felt as if he had greater commiseration for me than I had ever had for myself. It inspired me with new fortitude and new calmness to find that it was I who was under the necessity of reassuring him. I spoke to him of his voyage out and home, and of his future plans, and of his probable return to India. He said that was very doubtful. He had not found himself more favoured by fortune there than here. He had gone out a poor ship’s surgeon and had come home nothing better. While we were talking, and when I was glad to believe that I had alleviated (if I may use such a term) the shock he had had in seeing me, Richard came in. He had heard downstairs who was with me, and they met with cordial pleasure.

I saw that after their first greetings were over, and when they spoke of Richard’s career, Mr. Woodcourt had a perception that all was not going well with him. He frequently glanced at his face as if there were something in it that gave him pain, and more than once he looked towards me as though he sought to ascertain whether I knew what the truth was. Yet Richard was in one of his sanguine states and in good spirits and was thoroughly pleased to see Mr. Woodcourt again, whom he had always liked.

Richard proposed that we all should go to London together; but Mr. Woodcourt, having to remain by his ship a little longer, could not join us. He dined with us, however, at an early hour, and became so much more like what he used to be that I was still more at peace to think I had been able to soften his regrets. Yet his mind was not relieved of Richard. When the coach was almost ready and Richard ran down to look after his luggage, he spoke to me about him.

I was not sure that I had a right to lay his whole story open, but I referred in a few words to his estrangement from Mr Jarndyce and to his being entangled in the ill-fated Chancery suit. Mr. Woodcourt listened with interest and expressed his regret.

“I saw you observe him rather closely,” said I, “Do you think him so changed?”

“He is changed,” he returned, shaking his head.

I felt the blood rush into my face for the first time, but it was only an instantaneous emotion. I turned my head aside, and it was gone.

"It is not," said Mr. Woodcourt, "his being so much younger or older, or thinner or fatter, or paler or ruddier, as there being upon his face such a singular expression. I never saw so remarkable a look in a young person. One cannot say that it is all anxiety or all weariness; yet it is both, and like ungrown despair."

"You do not think he is ill?" said I.

No. He looked robust in body.

"That he cannot be at peace in mind, we have too much reason to know," I proceeded. "Mr. Woodcourt, you are going to London?"

"To-morrow or the next day."

"There is nothing Richard wants so much as a friend. He always liked you. Pray see him when you get there. Pray help him sometimes with your companionship if you can. You do not know of what service it might be. You cannot think how Ada, and Mr. Jarndyce, and even I—how we should all thank you, Mr. Woodcourt!"

"Miss Summerson," he said, more moved than he had been from the first, "before heaven, I will be a true friend to him! I will accept him as a trust, and it shall be a sacred one!"

"God bless you!" said I, with my eyes filling fast; but I thought they might, when it was not for myself. "Ada loves him—we all love him, but Ada loves him as we cannot. I will tell her what you say. Thank you, and God bless you, in her name!"

Richard came back as we finished exchanging these hurried words and gave me his arm to take me to the coach.

"Woodcourt," he said, unconscious with what application, "pray let us meet in London!"

"Meet?" returned the other. "I have scarcely a friend there now but you. Where shall I find you?"

"Why, I must get a lodging of some sort," said Richard, pondering. "Say at Vholes's, Symond's Inn."

"Good! Without loss of time."

They shook hands heartily. When I was seated in the coach and Richard was yet standing in the street, Mr. Woodcourt laid his friendly hand on Richard's shoulder and looked at me. I understood him and waved mine in

thanks.

And in his last look as we drove away, I saw that he was very sorry for me. I was glad to see it. I felt for my old self as the dead may feel if they ever revisit these scenes. I was glad to be tenderly remembered, to be gently pitied, not to be quite forgotten.

CHAPTER XLVI

Stop Him!

DARKNESS RESTS UPON TOM-ALL-ALONE'S. Dilating and dilating since the sun went down last night, it has gradually swelled until it fills every void in the place. For a time there were some dungeon lights burning, as the lamp of life hums in Tom-all-Alone's, heavily, heavily, in the nauseous air, and winking—as that lamp, too, winks in Tom-all-Alone's—at many horrible things. But they are blotted out. The moon has eyed Tom with a dull cold stare, as admitting some puny emulation of herself in his desert region unfit for life and blasted by volcanic fires; but she has passed on and is gone. The blackest nightmare in the infernal stables grazes on Tom-all-Alone's, and Tom is fast asleep.

Much mighty speech-making there has been, both in and out of Parliament, concerning Tom, and much wrathful disputation how Tom shall be got right. Whether he shall be put into the main road by constables, or by beadles, or by bell-ringing, or by force of figures, or by correct principles of taste, or by high church, or by low church, or by no church; whether he shall be set to splitting trusses of polemical straws with the crooked knife of his mind or whether he shall be put to stone-breaking instead. In the midst of which dust and noise there is but one thing perfectly clear, to wit, that Tom only may and can, or shall and will, be reclaimed according to somebody's theory but nobody's practice. And in the hopeful meantime, Tom goes to perdition head foremost in his old determined spirit.

But he has his revenge. Even the winds are his messengers, and they serve him in these hours of darkness. There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality

of his committing, but shall work its retribution through every order of society up to the proudest of the proud and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge.

It is a moot point whether Tom-all-Alone's be uglier by day or by night, but on the argument that the more that is seen of it the more shocking it must be, and that no part of it left to the imagination is at all likely to be made so bad as the reality, day carries it. The day begins to break now; and in truth it might be better for the national glory even that the sun should sometimes set upon the British dominions than that it should ever rise upon so vile a wonder as Tom.

A brown sunburnt gentleman, who appears in some inaptitude for sleep to be wandering abroad rather than counting the hours on a restless pillow, strolls hitherward at this quiet time. Attracted by curiosity, he often pauses and looks about him, up and down the miserable by-ways. Nor is he merely curious, for in his bright dark eye there is compassionate interest; and as he looks here and there, he seems to understand such wretchedness and to have studied it before.

On the banks of the stagnant channel of mud which is the main street of Tom-all-Alone's, nothing is to be seen but the crazy houses, shut up and silent. No waking creature save himself appears except in one direction, where he sees the solitary figure of a woman sitting on a door-step. He walks that way. Approaching, he observes that she has journeyed a long distance and is footsore and travel-stained. She sits on the door-step in the manner of one who is waiting, with her elbow on her knee and her head upon her hand. Beside her is a canvas bag, or bundle, she has carried. She is dozing probably, for she gives no heed to his steps as he comes toward her.

The broken footway is so narrow that when Allan Woodcourt comes to where the woman sits, he has to turn into the road to pass her. Looking down at her face, his eye meets hers, and he stops.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Can't you make them hear? Do you want to be let in?"

"I'm waiting till they get up at another house—a lodging-house—not here," the woman patiently returns. "I'm waiting here because there will be sun here presently to warm me."

"I am afraid you are tired. I am sorry to see you sitting in the street."

“Thank you, sir. It don’t matter.”

A habit in him of speaking to the poor and of avoiding patronage or condescension or childishness (which is the favourite device, many people deeming it quite a subtlety to talk to them like little spelling books) has put him on good terms with the woman easily.

“Let me look at your forehead,” he says, bending down. “I am a doctor. Don’t be afraid. I wouldn’t hurt you for the world.”

He knows that by touching her with his skilful and accustomed hand he can soothe her yet more readily. She makes a slight objection, saying, “It’s nothing”; but he has scarcely laid his fingers on the wounded place when she lifts it up to the light.

“Aye! A bad bruise, and the skin sadly broken. This must be very sore.”

“It do ache a little, sir,” returns the woman with a started tear upon her cheek.

“Let me try to make it more comfortable. My handkerchief won’t hurt you.”

“Oh, dear no, sir, I’m sure of that!”

He cleanses the injured place and dries it, and having carefully examined it and gently pressed it with the palm of his hand, takes a small case from his pocket, dresses it, and binds it up. While he is thus employed, he says, after laughing at his establishing a surgery in the street, “And so your husband is a brickmaker?”

“How do you know that, sir?” asks the woman, astonished.

“Why, I suppose so from the colour of the clay upon your bag and on your dress. And I know brickmakers go about working at piecework in different places. And I am sorry to say I have known them cruel to their wives too.”

The woman hastily lifts up her eyes as if she would deny that her injury is referable to such a cause. But feeling the hand upon her forehead, and seeing his busy and composed face, she quietly drops them again.

“Where is he now?” asks the surgeon.

“He got into trouble last night, sir; but he’ll look for me at the lodging-house.”

“He will get into worse trouble if he often misuses his large and heavy hand as he has misused it here. But you forgive him, brutal as he is, and I say no more of him, except that I wish he deserved it. You have no young

child?”

The woman shakes her head. “One as I calls mine, sir, but it’s Liz’s.”

“Your own is dead. I see! Poor little thing!”

By this time he has finished and is putting up his case. “I suppose you have some settled home. Is it far from here?” he asks, good-humouredly making light of what he has done as she gets up and curtsys.

“It’s a good two or three and twenty mile from here, sir. At Saint Albans. You know Saint Albans, sir? I thought you gave a start like, as if you did.”

“Yes, I know something of it. And now I will ask you a question in return. Have you money for your lodging?”

“Yes, sir,” she says, “really and truly.” And she shows it. He tells her, in acknowledgment of her many subdued thanks, that she is very welcome, gives her good day, and walks away. Tom-all-Alone’s is still asleep, and nothing is astir.

Yes, something is! As he retraces his way to the point from which he descried the woman at a distance sitting on the step, he sees a ragged figure coming very cautiously along, crouching close to the soiled walls—which the wretchedest figure might as well avoid—and furtively thrusting a hand before it. It is the figure of a youth whose face is hollow and whose eyes have an emaciated glare. He is so intent on getting along unseen that even the apparition of a stranger in whole garments does not tempt him to look back. He shades his face with his ragged elbow as he passes on the other side of the way, and goes shrinking and creeping on with his anxious hand before him and his shapeless clothes hanging in shreds. Clothes made for what purpose, or of what material, it would be impossible to say. They look, in colour and in substance, like a bundle of rank leaves of swampy growth that rotted long ago.

Allan Woodcourt pauses to look after him and note all this, with a shadowy belief that he has seen the boy before. He cannot recall how or where, but there is some association in his mind with such a form. He imagines that he must have seen it in some hospital or refuge, still, cannot make out why it comes with any special force on his remembrance.

He is gradually emerging from Tom-all-Alone’s in the morning light, thinking about it, when he hears running feet behind him, and looking round, sees the boy scouring towards him at great speed, followed by the woman.

“Stop him, stop him!” cries the woman, almost breathless. “Stop him, sir!”

He darts across the road into the boy’s path, but the boy is quicker than he, makes a curve, ducks, dives under his hands, comes up half-a-dozen yards beyond him, and scours away again. Still the woman follows, crying, “Stop him, sir, pray stop him!” Allan, not knowing but that he has just robbed her of her money, follows in chase and runs so hard that he runs the boy down a dozen times, but each time he repeats the curve, the duck, the dive, and scours away again. To strike at him on any of these occasions would be to fell and disable him, but the pursuer cannot resolve to do that, and so the grimly ridiculous pursuit continues. At last the fugitive, hard-pressed, takes to a narrow passage and a court which has no thoroughfare. Here, against a hoarding of decaying timber, he is brought to bay and tumbles down, lying gasping at his pursuer, who stands and gasps at him until the woman comes up.

“Oh, you, Jo!” cries the woman. “What? I have found you at last!”

“Jo,” repeats Allan, looking at him with attention, “Jo! Stay. To be sure! I recollect this lad some time ago being brought before the coroner.”

“Yes, I see you once afore at the inkwhich,” whimpers Jo. “What of that? Can’t you never let such an unfortnet as me alone? An’t I unfortnet enough for you yet? How unfortnet do you want me fur to be? I’ve been a-chivied and a-chivied, fust by one on you and nixt by another on you, till I’m worritted to skins and bones. The inkwhich warn’t MY fault. I done nothink. He wos wery good to me, he wos; he wos the only one I knowed to speak to, as ever come across my crossing. It ain’t wery likely I should want him to be inkwhiched. I only wish I wos, myself. I don’t know why I don’t go and make a hole in the water, I’m sure I don’t.”

He says it with such a pitiable air, and his grimy tears appear so real, and he lies in the corner up against the hoarding so like a growth of fungus or any unwholesome excrescence produced there in neglect and impurity, that Allan Woodcourt is softened towards him. He says to the woman, “Miserable creature, what has he done?”

To which she only replies, shaking her head at the prostrate figure more amazedly than angrily, “Oh, you Jo, you Jo. I have found you at last!”

“What has he done?” says Allan. “Has he robbed you?”

“No, sir, no. Robbed me? He did nothing but what was kind-hearted by

me, and that's the wonder of it."

Allan looks from Jo to the woman, and from the woman to Jo, waiting for one of them to unravel the riddle.

"But he was along with me, sir," says the woman. "Oh, you Jo! He was along with me, sir, down at Saint Albans, ill, and a young lady, Lord bless her for a good friend to me, took pity on him when I durstn't, and took him home—"

Allan shrinks back from him with a sudden horror.

"Yes, sir, yes. Took him home, and made him comfortable, and like a thankless monster he ran away in the night and never has been seen or heard of since till I set eyes on him just now. And that young lady that was such a pretty dear caught his illness, lost her beautiful looks, and wouldn't hardly be known for the same young lady now if it wasn't for her angel temper, and her pretty shape, and her sweet voice. Do you know it? You ungrateful wretch, do you know that this is all along of you and of her goodness to you?" demands the woman, beginning to rage at him as she recalls it and breaking into passionate tears.

The boy, in rough sort stunned by what he hears, falls to smearing his dirty forehead with his dirty palm, and to staring at the ground, and to shaking from head to foot until the crazy hoarding against which he leans rattles.

Allan restrains the woman, merely by a quiet gesture, but effectually.

"Richard told me—" He falters. "I mean, I have heard of this—don't mind me for a moment, I will speak presently."

He turns away and stands for a while looking out at the covered passage. When he comes back, he has recovered his composure, except that he contends against an avoidance of the boy, which is so very remarkable that it absorbs the woman's attention.

"You hear what she says. But get up, get up!"

Jo, shaking and chattering, slowly rises and stands, after the manner of his tribe in a difficulty, sideways against the hoarding, resting one of his high shoulders against it and covertly rubbing his right hand over his left and his left foot over his right.

"You hear what she says, and I know it's true. Have you been here ever since?"

"Wishermaydie if I seen Tom-all-Alone's till this blessed morning,"

replies Jo hoarsely.

"Why have you come here now?"

Jo looks all round the confined court, looks at his questioner no higher than the knees, and finally answers, "I don't know how to do nothink, and I can't get nothink to do. I'm wery poor and ill, and I thought I'd come back here when there warn't nobody about, and lay down and hide somewheres as I knows on till arter dark, and then go and beg a trifle of Mr. Snagsby. He wos allus willin fur to give me somethink he wos, though Mrs. Snagsby she was allus a-chivying on me—like everybody everywheres."

"Where have you come from?"

Jo looks all round the court again, looks at his questioner's knees again, and concludes by laying his profile against the hoarding in a sort of resignation.

"Did you hear me ask you where you have come from?"

"Tramp then," says Jo.

"Now tell me," proceeds Allan, making a strong effort to overcome his repugnance, going very near to him, and leaning over him with an expression of confidence, "tell me how it came about that you left that house when the good young lady had been so unfortunate as to pity you and take you home."

Jo suddenly comes out of his resignation and excitedly declares, addressing the woman, that he never known about the young lady, that he never heern about it, that he never went fur to hurt her, that he would sooner have hurt his own self, that he'd sooner have had his unfortnet ed chopped off than ever gone a-nigh her, and that she wos wery good to him, she wos. Conducting himself throughout as if in his poor fashion he really meant it, and winding up with some very miserable sobs.

Allan Woodcourt sees that this is not a sham. He constrains himself to touch him. "Come, Jo. Tell me."

"No. I dustn't," says Jo, relapsing into the profile state. "I dustn't, or I would."

"But I must know," returns the other, "all the same. Come, Jo."

After two or three such adjurations, Jo lifts up his head again, looks round the court again, and says in a low voice, "Well, I'll tell you something. I was took away. There!"

"Took away? In the night?"

“Ah!” Very apprehensive of being overheard, Jo looks about him and even glances up some ten feet at the top of the hoarding and through the cracks in it lest the object of his distrust should be looking over or hidden on the other side.

“Who took you away?”

“I dustn’t name him,” says Jo. “I dustn’t do it, sir.

“But I want, in the young lady’s name, to know. You may trust me. No one else shall hear.”

“Ah, but I don’t know,” replies Jo, shaking his head fearfully, “as he DON’T hear.”

“Why, he is not in this place.”

“Oh, ain’t he though?” says Jo. “He’s in all manner of places, all at wanst.”

Allan looks at him in perplexity, but discovers some real meaning and good faith at the bottom of this bewildering reply. He patiently awaits an explicit answer; and Jo, more baffled by his patience than by anything else, at last desperately whispers a name in his ear.

“Aye!” says Allan. “Why, what had you been doing?”

“Nothink, sir. Never done nothink to get myself into no trouble, ’sept in not moving on and the inkwhich. But I’m a-moving on now. I’m a-moving on to the berryin ground—that’s the move as I’m up to.”

“No, no, we will try to prevent that. But what did he do with you?”

“Put me in a horsepittle,” replied Jo, whispering, “till I was discharged, then giv me a little money—four half-bulls, wot you may call half-crowns—and ses ‘Hook it! Nobody wants you here,’ he ses. ‘You hook it. You go and tramp,’ he ses. ‘You move on,’ he ses. ‘Don’t let me ever see you nowheres within forty mile of London, or you’ll repent it.’ So I shall, if ever he doos see me, and he’ll see me if I’m above ground,” concludes Jo, nervously repeating all his former precautions and investigations.

Allan considers a little, then remarks, turning to the woman but keeping an encouraging eye on Jo, “He is not so ungrateful as you supposed. He had a reason for going away, though it was an insufficient one.”

“Thankee, sir, thankee!” exclaims Jo. “There now! See how hard you wos upon me. But ony you tell the young lady wot the genlmn ses, and it’s all right. For YOU wos wery good to me too, and I knows it.”

“Now, Jo,” says Allan, keeping his eye upon him, “come with me and I

will find you a better place than this to lie down and hide in. If I take one side of the way and you the other to avoid observation, you will not run away, I know very well, if you make me a promise."

"I won't, not unless I wos to see HIM a-coming, sir."

"Very well. I take your word. Half the town is getting up by this time, and the whole town will be broad awake in another hour. Come along. Good day again, my good woman."

"Good day again, sir, and I thank you kindly many times again."

She has been sitting on her bag, deeply attentive, and now rises and takes it up. Jo, repeating, "Ony you tell the young lady as I never went fur to hurt her and wot the genlmn ses!" nods and shambles and shivers, and smears and blinks, and half laughs and half cries, a farewell to her, and takes his creeping way along after Allan Woodcourt, close to the houses on the opposite side of the street. In this order, the two come up out of Tom-all-Alone's into the broad rays of the sunlight and the purer air.

CHAPTER XLVII

Jo’s Will

AS ALLAN WOODCOURT AND Jo proceed along the streets where the high church spires and the distances are so near and clear in the morning light that the city itself seems renewed by rest, Allan revolves in his mind how and where he shall bestow his companion. “It surely is a strange fact,” he considers, “that in the heart of a civilized world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog.” But it is none the less a fact because of its strangeness, and the difficulty remains.

At first he looks behind him often to assure himself that Jo is still really following. But look where he will, he still beholds him close to the opposite houses, making his way with his wary hand from brick to brick and from door to door, and often, as he creeps along, glancing over at him watchfully. Soon satisfied that the last thing in his thoughts is to give him the slip, Allan goes on, considering with a less divided attention what he shall do.

A breakfast-stall at a street-corner suggests the first thing to be done. He stops there, looks round, and beckons Jo. Jo crosses and comes halting and shuffling up, slowly scooping the knuckles of his right hand round and round in the hollowed palm of his left, kneading dirt with a natural pestle and mortar. What is a dainty repast to Jo is then set before him, and he begins to gulp the coffee and to gnaw the bread and butter, looking anxiously about him in all directions as he eats and drinks, like a scared animal.

But he is so sick and miserable that even hunger has abandoned him. “I thought I was amost a-starvin, sir,” says Jo, soon putting down his food, “but I don’t know nothink—not even that. I don’t care for eating wittles nor yet for drinking on ’em.” And Jo stands shivering and looking at the breakfast wonderingly.

Allan Woodcourt lays his hand upon his pulse and on his chest. “Draw breath, Jo!” “It draws,” says Jo, “as heavy as a cart.” He might add, “And rattles like it,” but he only mutters, “I’m a-moving on, sir.”

Allan looks about for an apothecary's shop. There is none at hand, but a tavern does as well or better. He obtains a little measure of wine and gives the lad a portion of it very carefully. He begins to revive almost as soon as it passes his lips. "We may repeat that dose, Jo," observes Allan after watching him with his attentive face. "So! Now we will take five minutes' rest, and then go on again."

Leaving the boy sitting on the bench of the breakfast-stall, with his back against an iron railing, Allan Woodcourt paces up and down in the early sunshine, casting an occasional look towards him without appearing to watch him. It requires no discernment to perceive that he is warmed and refreshed. If a face so shaded can brighten, his face brightens somewhat; and by little and little he eats the slice of bread he had so hopelessly laid down. Observant of these signs of improvement, Allan engages him in conversation and elicits to his no small wonder the adventure of the lady in the veil, with all its consequences. Jo slowly munches as he slowly tells it. When he has finished his story and his bread, they go on again.

Intending to refer his difficulty in finding a temporary place of refuge for the boy to his old patient, zealous little Miss Flite, Allan leads the way to the court where he and Jo first foregathered. But all is changed at the rag and bottle shop; Miss Flite no longer lodges there; it is shut up; and a hard-featured female, much obscured by dust, whose age is a problem, but who is indeed no other than the interesting Judy, is tart and spare in her replies. These sufficing, however, to inform the visitor that Miss Flite and her birds are domiciled with a Mrs. Blinder, in Bell Yard, he repairs to that neighbouring place, where Miss Flite (who rises early that she may be punctual at the divan of justice held by her excellent friend the Chancellor) comes running downstairs with tears of welcome and with open arms.

"My dear physician!" cries Miss Flite. "My meritorious, distinguished, honourable officer!" She uses some odd expressions, but is as cordial and full of heart as sanity itself can be—more so than it often is. Allan, very patient with her, waits until she has no more raptures to express, then points out Jo, trembling in a doorway, and tells her how he comes there.

"Where can I lodge him hereabouts for the present? Now, you have a fund of knowledge and good sense and can advise me."

Miss Flite, mighty proud of the compliment, sets herself to consider; but it is long before a bright thought occurs to her. Mrs. Blinder is entirely let,

and she herself occupies poor Gridley's room. "Gridley!" exclaims Miss Flite, clapping her hands after a twentieth repetition of this remark. "Gridley! To be sure! Of course! My dear physician! General George will help us out."

It is hopeless to ask for any information about General George, and would be, though Miss Flite had not already run upstairs to put on her pinched bonnet and her poor little shawl and to arm herself with her reticule of documents. But as she informs her physician in her disjointed manner on coming down in full array that General George, whom she often calls upon, knows her dear Fitz Jarndyce and takes a great interest in all connected with her, Allan is induced to think that they may be in the right way. So he tells Jo, for his encouragement, that this walking about will soon be over now; and they repair to the general's. Fortunately it is not far.

From the exterior of George's Shooting Gallery, and the long entry, and the bare perspective beyond it, Allan Woodcourt augurs well. He also descries promise in the figure of Mr. George himself, striding towards them in his morning exercise with his pipe in his mouth, no stock on, and his muscular arms, developed by broadsword and dumbbell, weightily asserting themselves through his light shirt-sleeves.

"Your servant, sir," says Mr. George with a military salute. Good-humouredly smiling all over his broad forehead up into his crisp hair, he then defers to Miss Flite, as, with great stateliness, and at some length, she performs the courtly ceremony of presentation. He winds it up with another "Your servant, sir!" and another salute.

"Excuse me, sir. A sailor, I believe?" says Mr. George.

"I am proud to find I have the air of one," returns Allan; "but I am only a sea-going doctor."

"Indeed, sir! I should have thought you was a regular blue-jacket myself."

Allan hopes Mr. George will forgive his intrusion the more readily on that account, and particularly that he will not lay aside his pipe, which, in his politeness, he has testified some intention of doing. "You are very good, sir," returns the trooper. "As I know by experience that it's not disagreeable to Miss Flite, and since it's equally agreeable to yourself—" and finishes the sentence by putting it between his lips again. Allan proceeds to tell him all he knows about Jo, unto which the trooper listens with a grave face.

“And that’s the lad, sir, is it?” he inquires, looking along the entry to where Jo stands staring up at the great letters on the whitewashed front, which have no meaning in his eyes.

“That’s he,” says Allan. “And, Mr. George, I am in this difficulty about him. I am unwilling to place him in a hospital, even if I could procure him immediate admission, because I foresee that he would not stay there many hours if he could be so much as got there. The same objection applies to a workhouse, supposing I had the patience to be evaded and shirked, and handed about from post to pillar in trying to get him into one, which is a system that I don’t take kindly to.”

“No man does, sir,” returns Mr. George.

“I am convinced that he would not remain in either place, because he is possessed by an extraordinary terror of this person who ordered him to keep out of the way; in his ignorance, he believes this person to be everywhere, and cognizant of everything.”

“I ask your pardon, sir,” says Mr. George. “But you have not mentioned that party’s name. Is it a secret, sir?”

“The boy makes it one. But his name is Bucket.”

“Bucket the detective, sir?”

“The same man.”

“The man is known to me, sir,” returns the trooper after blowing out a cloud of smoke and squaring his chest, “and the boy is so far correct that he undoubtedly is a—rum customer.” Mr. George smokes with a profound meaning after this and surveys Miss Flite in silence.

“Now, I wish Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Summerson at least to know that this Jo, who tells so strange a story, has reappeared, and to have it in their power to speak with him if they should desire to do so. Therefore I want to get him, for the present moment, into any poor lodging kept by decent people where he would be admitted. Decent people and Jo, Mr. George,” says Allan, following the direction of the trooper’s eyes along the entry, “have not been much acquainted, as you see. Hence the difficulty. Do you happen to know any one in this neighbourhood who would receive him for a while on my paying for him beforehand?”

As he puts the question, he becomes aware of a dirty-faced little man standing at the trooper’s elbow and looking up, with an oddly twisted figure and countenance, into the trooper’s face. After a few more puffs at his pipe,

the trooper looks down askant at the little man, and the little man winks up at the trooper.

"Well, sir," says Mr. George, "I can assure you that I would willingly be knocked on the head at any time if it would be at all agreeable to Miss Summerson, and consequently I esteem it a privilege to do that young lady any service, however small. We are naturally in the vagabond way here, sir, both myself and Phil. You see what the place is. You are welcome to a quiet corner of it for the boy if the same would meet your views. No charge made, except for rations. We are not in a flourishing state of circumstances here, sir. We are liable to be tumbled out neck and crop at a moment's notice. However, sir, such as the place is, and so long as it lasts, here it is at your service."

With a comprehensive wave of his pipe, Mr. George places the whole building at his visitor's disposal.

"I take it for granted, sir," he adds, "you being one of the medical staff, that there is no present infection about this unfortunate subject?"

Allan is quite sure of it.

"Because, sir," says Mr. George, shaking his head sorrowfully, "we have had enough of that."

His tone is no less sorrowfully echoed by his new acquaintance. "Still I am bound to tell you," observes Allan after repeating his former assurance, "that the boy is deplorably low and reduced and that he may be—I do not say that he is—too far gone to recover."

"Do you consider him in present danger, sir?" inquires the trooper.

"Yes, I fear so."

"Then, sir," returns the trooper in a decisive manner, "it appears to me—being naturally in the vagabond way myself—that the sooner he comes out of the street, the better. You, Phil! Bring him in!"

Mr. Squod tacks out, all on one side, to execute the word of command; and the trooper, having smoked his pipe, lays it by. Jo is brought in. He is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle's Tockahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs. Jellyby's lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely

sores are in him, homely rags are on him; native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee.

He shuffles slowly into Mr. George's gallery and stands huddled together in a bundle, looking all about the floor. He seems to know that they have an inclination to shrink from him, partly for what he is and partly for what he has caused. He, too, shrinks from them. He is not of the same order of things, not of the same place in creation. He is of no order and no place, neither of the beasts nor of humanity.

"Look here, Jo!" says Allan. "This is Mr. George."

Jo searches the floor for some time longer, then looks up for a moment, and then down again.

"He is a kind friend to you, for he is going to give you lodging room here."

Jo makes a scoop with one hand, which is supposed to be a bow. After a little more consideration and some backing and changing of the foot on which he rests, he mutters that he is "wery thankful."

"You are quite safe here. All you have to do at present is to be obedient and to get strong. And mind you tell us the truth here, whatever you do, Jo."

"Wishermaydie if I don't, sir," says Jo, reverting to his favourite declaration. "I never done nothink yit, but wot you knows on, to get myself into no trouble. I never was in no other trouble at all, sir, 'sept not knowin' nothink and starwation."

"I believe it, now attend to Mr. George. I see he is going to speak to you."

"My intention merely was, sir," observes Mr. George, amazingly broad and upright, "to point out to him where he can lie down and get a thorough good dose of sleep. Now, look here." As the trooper speaks, he conducts them to the other end of the gallery and opens one of the little cabins. "There you are, you see! Here is a mattress, and here you may rest, on good behaviour, as long as Mr., I ask your pardon, sir"—he refers apologetically to the card Allan has given him—"Mr. Woodcourt pleases. Don't you be alarmed if you hear shots; they'll be aimed at the target, and not you. Now, there's another thing I would recommend, sir," says the trooper, turning to his visitor. "Phil, come here!"

Phil bears down upon them according to his usual tactics. “Here is a man, sir, who was found, when a baby, in the gutter. Consequently, it is to be expected that he takes a natural interest in this poor creature. You do, don’t you, Phil?”

“Certainly and surely I do, guv’ner,” is Phil’s reply.

“Now I was thinking, sir,” says Mr. George in a martial sort of confidence, as if he were giving his opinion in a council of war at a drum-head, “that if this man was to take him to a bath and was to lay out a few shillings in getting him one or two coarse articles—”

“Mr. George, my considerate friend,” returns Allan, taking out his purse, “it is the very favour I would have asked.”

Phil Squod and Jo are sent out immediately on this work of improvement. Miss Flite, quite enraptured by her success, makes the best of her way to court, having great fears that otherwise her friend the Chancellor may be uneasy about her or may give the judgment she has so long expected in her absence, and observing “which you know, my dear physician, and general, after so many years, would be too absurdly unfortunate!” Allan takes the opportunity of going out to procure some restorative medicines, and obtaining them near at hand, soon returns to find the trooper walking up and down the gallery, and to fall into step and walk with him.

“I take it, sir,” says Mr. George, “that you know Miss Summerson pretty well?”

Yes, it appears.

“Not related to her, sir?”

No, it appears.

“Excuse the apparent curiosity,” says Mr. George. “It seemed to me probable that you might take more than a common interest in this poor creature because Miss Summerson had taken that unfortunate interest in him. ’Tis MY case, sir, I assure you.”

“And mine, Mr. George.”

The trooper looks sideways at Allan’s sunburnt cheek and bright dark eye, rapidly measures his height and build, and seems to approve of him.

“Since you have been out, sir, I have been thinking that I unquestionably know the rooms in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, where Bucket took the lad, according to his account. Though he is not acquainted with the name, I can

help you to it. It’s Tulkinghorn. That’s what it is.”

Allan looks at him inquiringly, repeating the name.

“Tulkinghorn. That’s the name, sir. I know the man, and know him to have been in communication with Bucket before, respecting a deceased person who had given him offence. I know the man, sir. To my sorrow.”

Allan naturally asks what kind of man he is.

“What kind of man! Do you mean to look at?”

“I think I know that much of him. I mean to deal with. Generally, what kind of man?”

“Why, then I’ll tell you, sir,” returns the trooper, stopping short and folding his arms on his square chest so angrily that his face fires and flushes all over; “he is a confoundedly bad kind of man. He is a slow-torturing kind of man. He is no more like flesh and blood than a rusty old carbine is. He is a kind of man—by George!—that has caused me more restlessness, and more uneasiness, and more dissatisfaction with myself than all other men put together. That’s the kind of man Mr. Tulkinghorn is!”

“I am sorry,” says Allan, “to have touched so sore a place.”

“Sore?” The trooper plants his legs wider apart, wets the palm of his broad right hand, and lays it on the imaginary moustache. “It’s no fault of yours, sir; but you shall judge. He has got a power over me. He is the man I spoke of just now as being able to tumble me out of this place neck and crop. He keeps me on a constant see-saw. He won’t hold off, and he won’t come on. If I have a payment to make him, or time to ask him for, or anything to go to him about, he don’t see me, don’t hear me—passes me on to Melchisedech’s in Clifford’s Inn, Melchisedech’s in Clifford’s Inn passes me back again to him—he keeps me prowling and dangling about him as if I was made of the same stone as himself. Why, I spend half my life now, pretty well, loitering and dodging about his door. What does he care? Nothing. Just as much as the rusty old carbine I have compared him to. He chafes and goads me till—Bah! Nonsense! I am forgetting myself. Mr. Woodcourt,” the trooper resumes his march, “all I say is, he is an old man; but I am glad I shall never have the chance of setting spurs to my horse and riding at him in a fair field. For if I had that chance, in one of the humours he drives me into—he’d go down, sir!”

Mr. George has been so excited that he finds it necessary to wipe his forehead on his shirt-sleeve. Even while he whistles his impetuosity away

with the national anthem, some involuntary shakings of his head and heavings of his chest still linger behind, not to mention an occasional hasty adjustment with both hands of his open shirt-collar, as if it were scarcely open enough to prevent his being troubled by a choking sensation. In short, Allan Woodcourt has not much doubt about the going down of Mr. Tulkinghorn on the field referred to.

Jo and his conductor presently return, and Jo is assisted to his mattress by the careful Phil, to whom, after due administration of medicine by his own hands, Allan confides all needful means and instructions. The morning is by this time getting on apace. He repairs to his lodgings to dress and breakfast, and then, without seeking rest, goes away to Mr. Jarndyce to communicate his discovery.

With him Mr. Jarndyce returns alone, confidentially telling him that there are reasons for keeping this matter very quiet indeed and showing a serious interest in it. To Mr. Jarndyce, Jo repeats in substance what he said in the morning, without any material variation. Only that cart of his is heavier to draw, and draws with a hollower sound.

“Let me lay here quiet and not be chivied no more,” falters Jo, “and be so kind any person as is a-passin nigh where I used fur to sleep, as jist to say to Mr. Sangsby that Jo, wot he known once, is a-moving on right forards with his duty, and I’ll be wery thankful. I’d be more thankful than I am aready if it wos any ways possible for an unfortnet to be it.”

He makes so many of these references to the law-stationer in the course of a day or two that Allan, after conferring with Mr. Jarndyce, good-naturedly resolves to call in Cook’s Court, the rather, as the cart seems to be breaking down.

To Cook’s Court, therefore, he repairs. Mr. Snagsby is behind his counter in his grey coat and sleeves, inspecting an indenture of several skins which has just come in from the engrosser’s, an immense desert of law-hand and parchment, with here and there a resting-place of a few large letters to break the awful monotony and save the traveller from despair. Mr Snagsby puts up at one of these inky wells and greets the stranger with his cough of general preparation for business.

“You don’t remember me, Mr. Snagsby?”

The stationer’s heart begins to thump heavily, for his old apprehensions have never abated. It is as much as he can do to answer, “No, sir, I can’t say

I do. I should have considered—not to put too fine a point upon it—that I never saw you before, sir."

"Twice before," says Allan Woodcourt. "Once at a poor bedside, and once—"

"It's come at last!" thinks the afflicted stationer, as recollection breaks upon him. "It's got to a head now and is going to burst!" But he has sufficient presence of mind to conduct his visitor into the little counting-house and to shut the door.

"Are you a married man, sir?"

"No, I am not."

"Would you make the attempt, though single," says Mr. Snagsby in a melancholy whisper, "to speak as low as you can? For my little woman is a-listening somewheres, or I'll forfeit the business and five hundred pound!"

In deep dejection Mr. Snagsby sits down on his stool, with his back against his desk, protesting, "I never had a secret of my own, sir. I can't charge my memory with ever having once attempted to deceive my little woman on my own account since she named the day. I wouldn't have done it, sir. Not to put too fine a point upon it, I couldn't have done it, I dursn't have done it. Whereas, and nevertheless, I find myself wrapped round with secrecy and mystery, till my life is a burden to me."

His visitor professes his regret to hear it and asks him does he remember Jo. Mr. Snagsby answers with a suppressed groan, oh, don't he!

"You couldn't name an individual human being—except myself—that my little woman is more set and determined against than Jo," says Mr. Snagsby.

Allan asks why.

"Why?" repeats Mr. Snagsby, in his desperation clutching at the clump of hair at the back of his bald head. "How should I know why? But you are a single person, sir, and may you long be spared to ask a married person such a question!"

With this beneficent wish, Mr. Snagsby coughs a cough of dismal resignation and submits himself to hear what the visitor has to communicate.

"There again!" says Mr. Snagsby, who, between the earnestness of his feelings and the suppressed tones of his voice is discoloured in the face. "At it again, in a new direction! A certain person charges me, in the solemnest

way, not to talk of Jo to any one, even my little woman. Then comes another certain person, in the person of yourself, and charges me, in an equally solemn way, not to mention Jo to that other certain person above all other persons. Why, this is a private asylum! Why, not to put too fine a point upon it, this is Bedlam, sir!" says Mr. Snagsby.

But it is better than he expected after all, being no explosion of the mine below him or deepening of the pit into which he has fallen. And being tender-hearted and affected by the account he hears of Jo's condition, he readily engages to "look round" as early in the evening as he can manage it quietly. He looks round very quietly when the evening comes, but it may turn out that Mrs. Snagsby is as quiet a manager as he.

Jo is very glad to see his old friend and says, when they are left alone, that he takes it uncommon kind as Mr. Sangsby should come so far out of his way on accounts of sich as him. Mr. Snagsby, touched by the spectacle before him, immediately lays upon the table half a crown, that magic balsam of his for all kinds of wounds.

"And how do you find yourself, my poor lad?" inquires the stationer with his cough of sympathy.

"I am in luck, Mr. Sangsby, I am," returns Jo, "and don't want for nothink. I'm more cumfbler nor you can't think. Mr. Sangsby! I'm wery sorry that I done it, but I didn't go fur to do it, sir."

The stationer softly lays down another half-crown and asks him what it is that he is sorry for having done.

"Mr. Sangsby," says Jo, "I went and giv a illness to the lady as wos and yit as warn't the t'other lady, and none of 'em never says nothink to me for having done it, on accounts of their being ser good and my having been s'unfortnet. The lady come herself and see me yesday, and she ses, 'Ah, Jo!' she ses. 'We thought we'd lost you, Jo!' she ses. And she sits down a-smilin so quiet, and don't pass a word nor yit a look upon me for having done it, she don't, and I turns agin the wall, I doos, Mr. Sangsby. And Mr. Jarnders, I see him a-forced to turn away his own self. And Mr. Woodcot, he come fur to giv me somethink fur to ease me, wot he's allus a-doin' on day and night, and wen he come a-bending over me and a-speakin up so bold, I see his tears a-fallin, Mr. Sangsby."

The softened stationer deposits another half-crown on the table. Nothing less than a repetition of that infallible remedy will relieve his feelings.

“Wot I was a-thinkin on, Mr. Sangsby,” proceeds Jo, “wos, as you wos able to write wery large, p’raps?”

“Yes, Jo, please God,” returns the stationer.

“Uncommon precious large, p’raps?” says Jo with eagerness.

“Yes, my poor boy.”

Jo laughs with pleasure. “Wot I wos a-thinking on then, Mr. Sangsby, wos, that when I wos moved on as fur as ever I could go and couldn’t be moved no furder, whether you might be so good p’raps as to write out, wery large so that any one could see it anywheres, as that I wos wery truly hearty sorry that I done it and that I never went fur to do it, and that though I didn’t know nothink at all, I knowd as Mr. Woodcot once cried over it and wos allus grieved over it, and that I hoped as he’d be able to forgive me in his mind. If the writin could be made to say it wery large, he might.”

“It shall say it, Jo. Very large.”

Jo laughs again. “Thankee, Mr. Sangsby. It’s wery kind of you, sir, and it makes me more cumfbler nor I was afore.”

The meek little stationer, with a broken and unfinished cough, slips down his fourth half-crown—he has never been so close to a case requiring so many—and is fain to depart. And Jo and he, upon this little earth, shall meet no more. No more.

For the cart so hard to draw is near its journey’s end and drags over stony ground. All round the clock it labours up the broken steps, shattered and worn. Not many times can the sun rise and behold it still upon its weary road.

Phil Squod, with his smoky gunpowder visage, at once acts as nurse and works as armourer at his little table in a corner, often looking round and saying with a nod of his green-baize cap and an encouraging elevation of his one eyebrow, “Hold up, my boy! Hold up!” There, too, is Mr. Jarndyce many a time, and Allan Woodcourt almost always, both thinking, much, how strangely fate has entangled this rough outcast in the web of very different lives. There, too, the trooper is a frequent visitor, filling the doorway with his athletic figure and, from his superfluity of life and strength, seeming to shed down temporary vigour upon Jo, who never fails to speak more robustly in answer to his cheerful words.

Jo is in a sleep or in a stupor to-day, and Allan Woodcourt, newly arrived, stands by him, looking down upon his wasted form. After a while

he softly seats himself upon the bedside with his face towards him—just as he sat in the law-writer's room—and touches his chest and heart. The cart had very nearly given up, but labours on a little more.

The trooper stands in the doorway, still and silent. Phil has stopped in a low clinking noise, with his little hammer in his hand. Mr. Woodcourt looks round with that grave professional interest and attention on his face, and glancing significantly at the trooper, signs to Phil to carry his table out. When the little hammer is next used, there will be a speck of rust upon it.

"Well, Jo! What is the matter? Don't be frightened."

"I thought," says Jo, who has started and is looking round, "I thought I was in Tom-all-Alone's agin. Ain't there nobody here but you, Mr. Woodcot?"

"Nobody."

"And I ain't took back to Tom-all-Alone's. Am I, sir?"

"No." Jo closes his eyes, muttering, "I'm wery thankful."

After watching him closely a little while, Allan puts his mouth very near his ear and says to him in a low, distinct voice, "Jo! Did you ever know a prayer?"

"Never knowd nothink, sir."

"Not so much as one short prayer?"

"No, sir. Nothink at all. Mr. Chadbands he wos a-prayin wunst at Mr. Sangsby's and I heerd him, but he sounded as if he wos a-speakin to hisself, and not to me. He prayed a lot, but I couldn't make out nothink on it. Different times there was other genlmen come down Tom-all-Alone's a-prayin, but they all mostly sed as the t'other 'wuns prayed wrong, and all mostly sounded to be a-talking to theirselves, or a-passing blame on the t'others, and not a-talkin to us. WE never knowd nothink. I never knowd what it wos all about."

It takes him a long time to say this, and few but an experienced and attentive listener could hear, or, hearing, understand him. After a short relapse into sleep or stupor, he makes, of a sudden, a strong effort to get out of bed.

"Stay, Jo! What now?"

"It's time for me to go to that there berryin ground, sir," he returns with a wild look.

"Lie down, and tell me. What burying ground, Jo?"

“Where they laid him as wos wery good to me, wery good to me indeed, he wos. It’s time fur me to go down to that there berryin ground, sir, and ask to be put along with him. I wants to go there and be berried. He used fur to say to me, ‘I am as poor as you to-day, Jo,’ he ses. I wants to tell him that I am as poor as him now and have come there to be laid along with him.”

“By and by, Jo. By and by.”

“Ah! P’raps they wouldn’t do it if I wos to go myself. But will you promise to have me took there, sir, and laid along with him?”

“I will, indeed.”

“Thankee, sir. Thankee, sir. They’ll have to get the key of the gate afore they can take me in, for it’s allus locked. And there’s a step there, as I used for to clean with my broom. It’s turned wery dark, sir. Is there any light a-comin?”

“It is coming fast, Jo.”

Fast. The cart is shaken all to pieces, and the rugged road is very near its end.

“Jo, my poor fellow!”

“I hear you, sir, in the dark, but I’m a-gropin—a-gropin—let me catch hold of your hand.”

“Jo, can you say what I say?”

“I’ll say anythink as you say, sir, for I knows it’s good.”

“Our Father.”

“Our Father! Yes, that’s wery good, sir.”

“Which art in heaven.”

“Art in heaven—is the light a-comin, sir?”

“It is close at hand. Hallowed be thy name!”

“Hallowed be—thy—”

The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead!

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, right reverends and wrong reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day.

CHAPTER XLVIII

Closing In

THE PLACE IN LINCOLNSHIRE has shut its many eyes again, and the house in town is awake. In Lincolnshire the Dedlocks of the past doze in their picture-frames, and the low wind murmurs through the long drawing-room as if they were breathing pretty regularly. In town the Dedlocks of the present rattle in their fire-eyed carriages through the darkness of the night, and the Dedlock Mercuries, with ashes (or hair-powder) on their heads, symptomatic of their great humility, loll away the drowsy mornings in the little windows of the hall. The fashionable world—tremendous orb, nearly five miles round—is in full swing, and the solar system works respectfully at its appointed distances.

Where the throng is thickest, where the lights are brightest, where all the senses are ministered to with the greatest delicacy and refinement, Lady Dedlock is. From the shining heights she has scaled and taken, she is never absent. Though the belief she of old reposed in herself as one able to reserve whatsoever she would under her mantle of pride is beaten down, though she has no assurance that what she is to those around her she will remain another day, it is not in her nature when envious eyes are looking on to yield or to droop. They say of her that she has lately grown more handsome and more haughty. The debilitated cousin says of her that she's beauty nough—tsetup shopofwomen—but rather larming kind—remindingmanfact—inconvenient woman—who WILL getoutofbedandbawthstahlishment—Shakespeare.

Mr. Tulkinghorn says nothing, looks nothing. Now, as heretofore, he is to be found in doorways of rooms, with his limp white cravat loosely twisted into its old-fashioned tie, receiving patronage from the peerage and making no sign. Of all men he is still the last who might be supposed to have any influence upon my Lady. Of all women she is still the last who might be supposed to have any dread of him.

One thing has been much on her mind since their late interview in his

turret-room at Chesney Wold. She is now decided, and prepared to throw it off.

It is morning in the great world, afternoon according to the little sun. The Mercuries, exhausted by looking out of window, are reposing in the hall and hang their heavy heads, the gorgeous creatures, like overblown sunflowers. Like them, too, they seem to run to a deal of seed in their tags and trimmings. Sir Leicester, in the library, has fallen asleep for the good of the country over the report of a Parliamentary committee. My Lady sits in the room in which she gave audience to the young man of the name of Guppy. Rosa is with her and has been writing for her and reading to her. Rosa is now at work upon embroidery or some such pretty thing, and as she bends her head over it, my Lady watches her in silence. Not for the first time to-day.

"Rosa."

The pretty village face looks brightly up. Then, seeing how serious my Lady is, looks puzzled and surprised.

"See to the door. Is it shut?"

Yes. She goes to it and returns, and looks yet more surprised.

"I am about to place confidence in you, child, for I know I may trust your attachment, if not your judgment. In what I am going to do, I will not disguise myself to you at least. But I confide in you. Say nothing to any one of what passes between us."

The timid little beauty promises in all earnestness to be trustworthy.

"Do you know," Lady Dedlock asks her, signing to her to bring her chair nearer, "do you know, Rosa, that I am different to you from what I am to any one?"

"Yes, my Lady. Much kinder. But then I often think I know you as you really are."

"You often think you know me as I really am? Poor child, poor child!"

She says it with a kind of scorn—though not of Rosa—and sits brooding, looking dreamily at her.

"Do you think, Rosa, you are any relief or comfort to me? Do you suppose your being young and natural, and fond of me and grateful to me, makes it any pleasure to me to have you near me?"

"I don't know, my Lady; I can scarcely hope so. But with all my heart, I wish it was so."

“It is so, little one.”

The pretty face is checked in its flush of pleasure by the dark expression on the handsome face before it. It looks timidly for an explanation.

“And if I were to say to-day, ‘Go! Leave me!’ I should say what would give me great pain and disquiet, child, and what would leave me very solitary.”

“My Lady! Have I offended you?”

“In nothing. Come here.”

Rosa bends down on the footstool at my Lady’s feet. My Lady, with that motherly touch of the famous ironmaster night, lays her hand upon her dark hair and gently keeps it there.

“I told you, Rosa, that I wished you to be happy and that I would make you so if I could make anybody happy on this earth. I cannot. There are reasons now known to me, reasons in which you have no part, rendering it far better for you that you should not remain here. You must not remain here. I have determined that you shall not. I have written to the father of your lover, and he will be here to-day. All this I have done for your sake.”

The weeping girl covers her hand with kisses and says what shall she do, what shall she do, when they are separated! Her mistress kisses her on the cheek and makes no other answer.

“Now, be happy, child, under better circumstances. Be beloved and happy!”

“Ah, my Lady, I have sometimes thought—forgive my being so free—that YOU are not happy.”

“I!”

“Will you be more so when you have sent me away? Pray, pray, think again. Let me stay a little while!”

“I have said, my child, that what I do, I do for your sake, not my own. It is done. What I am towards you, Rosa, is what I am now—not what I shall be a little while hence. Remember this, and keep my confidence. Do so much for my sake, and thus all ends between us!”

She detaches herself from her simple-hearted companion and leaves the room. Late in the afternoon, when she next appears upon the staircase, she is in her haughtiest and coldest state. As indifferent as if all passion, feeling, and interest had been worn out in the earlier ages of the world and had perished from its surface with its other departed monsters.

Mercury has announced Mr. Rouncewell, which is the cause of her appearance. Mr. Rouncewell is not in the library, but she repairs to the library. Sir Leicester is there, and she wishes to speak to him first.

"Sir Leicester, I am desirous—but you are engaged."

Oh, dear no! Not at all. Only Mr. Tulkinghorn.

Always at hand. Haunting every place. No relief or security from him for a moment.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Dedlock. Will you allow me to retire?"

With a look that plainly says, "You know you have the power to remain if you will," she tells him it is not necessary and moves towards a chair. Mr. Tulkinghorn brings it a little forward for her with his clumsy bow and retires into a window opposite. Interposed between her and the fading light of day in the now quiet street, his shadow falls upon her, and he darkens all before her. Even so does he darken her life.

It is a dull street under the best conditions, where the two long rows of houses stare at each other with that severity that half-a-dozen of its greatest mansions seem to have been slowly stared into stone rather than originally built in that material. It is a street of such dismal grandeur, so determined not to condescend to liveliness, that the doors and windows hold a gloomy state of their own in black paint and dust, and the echoing mews behind have a dry and massive appearance, as if they were reserved to stable the stone chargers of noble statues. Complicated garnish of iron-work entwines itself over the flights of steps in this awful street, and from these petrified bowers, extinguishers for obsolete flambeaux gasp at the upstart gas. Here and there a weak little iron hoop, through which bold boys aspire to throw their friends' caps (its only present use), retains its place among the rusty foliage, sacred to the memory of departed oil. Nay, even oil itself, yet lingering at long intervals in a little absurd glass pot, with a knob in the bottom like an oyster, blinks and sulks at newer lights every night, like its high and dry master in the House of Lords.

Therefore there is not much that Lady Dedlock, seated in her chair, could wish to see through the window in which Mr. Tulkinghorn stands. And yet—and yet—she sends a look in that direction as if it were her heart's desire to have that figure moved out of the way.

Sir Leicester begs his Lady's pardon. She was about to say?

"Only that Mr. Rouncewell is here (he has called by my appointment)

and that we had better make an end of the question of that girl. I am tired to death of the matter."

"What can I do—to—assist?" demands Sir Leicester in some considerable doubt.

"Let us see him here and have done with it. Will you tell them to send him up?"

"Mr. Tulkinghorn, be so good as to ring. Thank you. Request," says Sir Leicester to Mercury, not immediately remembering the business term, "request the iron gentleman to walk this way."

Mercury departs in search of the iron gentleman, finds, and produces him. Sir Leicester receives that ferruginous person graciously.

"I hope you are well, Mr. Rouncewell. Be seated. (My solicitor, Mr. Tulkinghorn.) My Lady was desirous, Mr. Rouncewell," Sir Leicester skilfully transfers him with a solemn wave of his hand, "was desirous to speak with you. Hem!"

"I shall be very happy," returns the iron gentleman, "to give my best attention to anything Lady Dedlock does me the honour to say."

As he turns towards her, he finds that the impression she makes upon him is less agreeable than on the former occasion. A distant supercilious air makes a cold atmosphere about her, and there is nothing in her bearing, as there was before, to encourage openness.

"Pray, sir," says Lady Dedlock listlessly, "may I be allowed to inquire whether anything has passed between you and your son respecting your son's fancy?"

It is almost too troublesome to her languid eyes to bestow a look upon him as she asks this question.

"If my memory serves me, Lady Dedlock, I said, when I had the pleasure of seeing you before, that I should seriously advise my son to conquer that —fancy." The ironmaster repeats her expression with a little emphasis.

"And did you?"

"Oh! Of course I did."

Sir Leicester gives a nod, approving and confirmatory. Very proper. The iron gentleman, having said that he would do it, was bound to do it. No difference in this respect between the base metals and the precious. Highly proper.

"And pray has he done so?"

“Really, Lady Dedlock, I cannot make you a definite reply. I fear not. Probably not yet. In our condition of life, we sometimes couple an intention with our—our fancies which renders them not altogether easy to throw off. I think it is rather our way to be in earnest.”

Sir Leicester has a misgiving that there may be a hidden Wat Tylerish meaning in this expression, and fumes a little. Mr. Rouncewell is perfectly good-humoured and polite, but within such limits, evidently adapts his tone to his reception.

“Because,” proceeds my Lady, “I have been thinking of the subject, which is tiresome to me.”

“I am very sorry, I am sure.”

“And also of what Sir Leicester said upon it, in which I quite concur”—Sir Leicester flattered—“and if you cannot give us the assurance that this fancy is at an end, I have come to the conclusion that the girl had better leave me.”

“I can give no such assurance, Lady Dedlock. Nothing of the kind.”

“Then she had better go.”

“Excuse me, my Lady,” Sir Leicester considerately interposes, “but perhaps this may be doing an injury to the young woman which she has not merited. Here is a young woman,” says Sir Leicester, magnificently laying out the matter with his right hand like a service of plate, “whose good fortune it is to have attracted the notice and favour of an eminent lady and to live, under the protection of that eminent lady, surrounded by the various advantages which such a position confers, and which are unquestionably very great—I believe unquestionably very great, sir—for a young woman in that station of life. The question then arises, should that young woman be deprived of these many advantages and that good fortune simply because she has”—Sir Leicester, with an apologetic but dignified inclination of his head towards the ironmaster, winds up his sentence—“has attracted the notice of Mr Rouncewell’s son? Now, has she deserved this punishment? Is this just towards her? Is this our previous understanding?”

“I beg your pardon,” interposes Mr. Rouncewell’s son’s father. “Sir Leicester, will you allow me? I think I may shorten the subject. Pray dismiss that from your consideration. If you remember anything so unimportant—which is not to be expected—you would recollect that my first thought in the affair was directly opposed to her remaining here.”

Dismiss the Dedlock patronage from consideration? Oh! Sir Leicester is bound to believe a pair of ears that have been handed down to him through such a family, or he really might have mistrusted their report of the iron gentleman's observations.

"It is not necessary," observes my Lady in her coldest manner before he can do anything but breathe amazedly, "to enter into these matters on either side. The girl is a very good girl; I have nothing whatever to say against her, but she is so far insensible to her many advantages and her good fortune that she is in love—or supposes she is, poor little fool—and unable to appreciate them."

Sir Leicester begs to observe that wholly alters the case. He might have been sure that my Lady had the best grounds and reasons in support of her view. He entirely agrees with my Lady. The young woman had better go.

"As Sir Leicester observed, Mr. Rouncewell, on the last occasion when we were fatigued by this business," Lady Dedlock languidly proceeds, "we cannot make conditions with you. Without conditions, and under present circumstances, the girl is quite misplaced here and had better go. I have told her so. Would you wish to have her sent back to the village, or would you like to take her with you, or what would you prefer?"

"Lady Dedlock, if I may speak plainly—"

"By all means."

"—I should prefer the course which will the soonest relieve you of the incumbrance and remove her from her present position."

"And to speak as plainly," she returns with the same studied carelessness, "so should I. Do I understand that you will take her with you?"

The iron gentleman makes an iron bow.

"Sir Leicester, will you ring?" Mr. Tulkinghorn steps forward from his window and pulls the bell. "I had forgotten you. Thank you." He makes his usual bow and goes quietly back again. Mercury, swift-responsive, appears, receives instructions whom to produce, skims away, produces the aforesaid, and departs.

Rosa has been crying and is yet in distress. On her coming in, the ironmaster leaves his chair, takes her arm in his, and remains with her near the door ready to depart.

"You are taken charge of, you see," says my Lady in her weary manner,

“and are going away well protected. I have mentioned that you are a very good girl, and you have nothing to cry for.”

“She seems after all,” observes Mr. Tulkinghorn, loitering a little forward with his hands behind him, “as if she were crying at going away.”

“Why, she is not well-bred, you see,” returns Mr. Rouncewell with some quickness in his manner, as if he were glad to have the lawyer to retort upon, “and she is an inexperienced little thing and knows no better. If she had remained here, sir, she would have improved, no doubt.”

“No doubt,” is Mr. Tulkinghorn’s composed reply.

Rosa sobs out that she is very sorry to leave my Lady, and that she was happy at Chesney Wold, and has been happy with my Lady, and that she thanks my Lady over and over again. “Out, you silly little puss!” says the ironmaster, checking her in a low voice, though not angrily. “Have a spirit, if you’re fond of Watt!” My Lady merely waves her off with indifference, saying, “There, there, child! You are a good girl. Go away!” Sir Leicester has magnificently disengaged himself from the subject and retired into the sanctuary of his blue coat. Mr. Tulkinghorn, an indistinct form against the dark street now dotted with lamps, looms in my Lady’s view, bigger and blacker than before.

“Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock,” says Mr. Rouncewell after a pause of a few moments, “I beg to take my leave, with an apology for having again troubled you, though not of my own act, on this tiresome subject. I can very well understand, I assure you, how tiresome so small a matter must have become to Lady Dedlock. If I am doubtful of my dealing with it, it is only because I did not at first quietly exert my influence to take my young friend here away without troubling you at all. But it appeared to me—I dare say magnifying the importance of the thing—that it was respectful to explain to you how the matter stood and candid to consult your wishes and convenience. I hope you will excuse my want of acquaintance with the polite world.”

Sir Leicester considers himself evoked out of the sanctuary by these remarks. “Mr. Rouncewell,” he returns, “do not mention it. Justifications are unnecessary, I hope, on either side.”

“I am glad to hear it, Sir Leicester; and if I may, by way of a last word, revert to what I said before of my mother’s long connexion with the family and the worth it bespeaks on both sides, I would point out this little instance

here on my arm who shows herself so affectionate and faithful in parting and in whom my mother, I dare say, has done something to awaken such feelings—though of course Lady Dedlock, by her heartfelt interest and her genial condescension, has done much more."

If he mean this ironically, it may be truer than he thinks. He points it, however, by no deviation from his straightforward manner of speech, though in saying it he turns towards that part of the dim room where my Lady sits. Sir Leicester stands to return his parting salutation, Mr. Tulkinghorn again rings, Mercury takes another flight, and Mr. Rouncewell and Rosa leave the house.

Then lights are brought in, discovering Mr. Tulkinghorn still standing in his window with his hands behind him and my Lady still sitting with his figure before her, closing up her view of the night as well as of the day. She is very pale. Mr. Tulkinghorn, observing it as she rises to retire, thinks, "Well she may be! The power of this woman is astonishing. She has been acting a part the whole time." But he can act a part too—his one unchanging character—and as he holds the door open for this woman, fifty pairs of eyes, each fifty times sharper than Sir Leicester's pair, should find no flaw in him.

Lady Dedlock dines alone in her own room to-day. Sir Leicester is whipped in to the rescue of the Doodle Party and the discomfiture of the Coodle Faction. Lady Dedlock asks on sitting down to dinner, still deadly pale (and quite an illustration of the debilitated cousin's text), whether he is gone out? Yes. Whether Mr. Tulkinghorn is gone yet? No. Presently she asks again, is he gone YET? No. What is he doing? Mercury thinks he is writing letters in the library. Would my Lady wish to see him? Anything but that.

But he wishes to see my Lady. Within a few more minutes he is reported as sending his respects, and could my Lady please to receive him for a word or two after her dinner? My Lady will receive him now. He comes now, apologizing for intruding, even by her permission, while she is at table. When they are alone, my Lady waves her hand to dispense with such mockeries.

"What do you want, sir?"

"Why, Lady Dedlock," says the lawyer, taking a chair at a little distance from her and slowly rubbing his rusty legs up and down, up and down, up

and down, “I am rather surprised by the course you have taken.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, decidedly. I was not prepared for it. I consider it a departure from our agreement and your promise. It puts us in a new position, Lady Dedlock. I feel myself under the necessity of saying that I don’t approve of it.”

He stops in his rubbing and looks at her, with his hands on his knees. Imperturbable and unchangeable as he is, there is still an indefinable freedom in his manner which is new and which does not escape this woman’s observation.

“I do not quite understand you.”

“Oh, yes you do, I think. I think you do. Come, come, Lady Dedlock, we must not fence and parry now. You know you like this girl.”

“Well, sir?”

“And you know—and I know—that you have not sent her away for the reasons you have assigned, but for the purpose of separating her as much as possible from—excuse my mentioning it as a matter of business—any reproach and exposure that impend over yourself.”

“Well, sir?”

“Well, Lady Dedlock,” returns the lawyer, crossing his legs and nursing the uppermost knee. “I object to that. I consider that a dangerous proceeding. I know it to be unnecessary and calculated to awaken speculation, doubt, rumour, I don’t know what, in the house. Besides, it is a violation of our agreement. You were to be exactly what you were before. Whereas, it must be evident to yourself, as it is to me, that you have been this evening very different from what you were before. Why, bless my soul, Lady Dedlock, transparently so!”

“If, sir,” she begins, “in my knowledge of my secret—” But he interrupts her.

“Now, Lady Dedlock, this is a matter of business, and in a matter of business the ground cannot be kept too clear. It is no longer your secret. Excuse me. That is just the mistake. It is my secret, in trust for Sir Leicester and the family. If it were your secret, Lady Dedlock, we should not be here holding this conversation.”

“That is very true. If in my knowledge of THE secret I do what I can to spare an innocent girl (especially, remembering your own reference to her

when you told my story to the assembled guests at Chesney Wold) from the taint of my impending shame, I act upon a resolution I have taken. Nothing in the world, and no one in the world, could shake it or could move me." This she says with great deliberation and distinctness and with no more outward passion than himself. As for him, he methodically discusses his matter of business as if she were any insensible instrument used in business.

"Really? Then you see, Lady Dedlock," he returns, "you are not to be trusted. You have put the case in a perfectly plain way, and according to the literal fact; and that being the case, you are not to be trusted."

"Perhaps you may remember that I expressed some anxiety on this same point when we spoke at night at Chesney Wold?"

"Yes," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, coolly getting up and standing on the hearth. "Yes. I recollect, Lady Dedlock, that you certainly referred to the girl, but that was before we came to our arrangement, and both the letter and the spirit of our arrangement altogether precluded any action on your part founded upon my discovery. There can be no doubt about that. As to sparing the girl, of what importance or value is she? Spare! Lady Dedlock, here is a family name compromised. One might have supposed that the course was straight on—over everything, neither to the right nor to the left, regardless of all considerations in the way, sparing nothing, treading everything under foot."

She has been looking at the table. She lifts up her eyes and looks at him. There is a stern expression on her face and a part of her lower lip is compressed under her teeth. "This woman understands me," Mr. Tulkinghorn thinks as she lets her glance fall again. "SHE cannot be spared. Why should she spare others?"

For a little while they are silent. Lady Dedlock has eaten no dinner, but has twice or thrice poured out water with a steady hand and drunk it. She rises from table, takes a lounging-chair, and reclines in it, shading her face. There is nothing in her manner to express weakness or excite compassion. It is thoughtful, gloomy, concentrated. "This woman," thinks Mr. Tulkinghorn, standing on the hearth, again a dark object closing up her view, "is a study."

He studies her at his leisure, not speaking for a time. She too studies something at her leisure. She is not the first to speak, appearing indeed so unlikely to be so, though he stood there until midnight, that even he is

driven upon breaking silence.

“Lady Dedlock, the most disagreeable part of this business interview remains, but it is business. Our agreement is broken. A lady of your sense and strength of character will be prepared for my now declaring it void and taking my own course.”

“I am quite prepared.”

Mr. Tulkinghorn inclines his head. “That is all I have to trouble you with, Lady Dedlock.”

She stops him as he is moving out of the room by asking, “This is the notice I was to receive? I wish not to misapprehend you.”

“Not exactly the notice you were to receive, Lady Dedlock, because the contemplated notice supposed the agreement to have been observed. But virtually the same, virtually the same. The difference is merely in a lawyer’s mind.”

“You intend to give me no other notice?”

“You are right. No.”

“Do you contemplate undeceiving Sir Leicester to-night?”

“A home question!” says Mr. Tulkinghorn with a slight smile and cautiously shaking his head at the shaded face. “No, not to-night.”

“To-morrow?”

“All things considered, I had better decline answering that question, Lady Dedlock. If I were to say I don’t know when, exactly, you would not believe me, and it would answer no purpose. It may be to-morrow. I would rather say no more. You are prepared, and I hold out no expectations which circumstances might fail to justify. I wish you good evening.”

She removes her hand, turns her pale face towards him as he walks silently to the door, and stops him once again as he is about to open it.

“Do you intend to remain in the house any time? I heard you were writing in the library. Are you going to return there?”

“Only for my hat. I am going home.”

She bows her eyes rather than her head, the movement is so slight and curious, and he withdraws. Clear of the room he looks at his watch but is inclined to doubt it by a minute or thereabouts. There is a splendid clock upon the staircase, famous, as splendid clocks not often are, for its accuracy. “And what do YOU say,” Mr. Tulkinghorn inquires, referring to it. “What do you say?”

If it said now, “Don’t go home!” What a famous clock, hereafter, if it said to-night of all the nights that it has counted off, to this old man of all the young and old men who have ever stood before it, “Don’t go home!” With its sharp clear bell it strikes three quarters after seven and ticks on again. “Why, you are worse than I thought you,” says Mr. Tulkinghorn, muttering reproof to his watch. “Two minutes wrong? At this rate you won’t last my time.” What a watch to return good for evil if it ticked in answer, “Don’t go home!”

He passes out into the streets and walks on, with his hands behind him, under the shadow of the lofty houses, many of whose mysteries, difficulties, mortgages, delicate affairs of all kinds, are treasured up within his old black satin waistcoat. He is in the confidence of the very bricks and mortar. The high chimney-stacks telegraph family secrets to him. Yet there is not a voice in a mile of them to whisper, “Don’t go home!”

Through the stir and motion of the commoner streets; through the roar and jar of many vehicles, many feet, many voices; with the blazing shop-lights lighting him on, the west wind blowing him on, and the crowd pressing him on, he is pitilessly urged upon his way, and nothing meets him murmuring, “Don’t go home!” Arrived at last in his dull room to light his candles, and look round and up, and see the Roman pointing from the ceiling, there is no new significance in the Roman’s hand to-night or in the flutter of the attendant groups to give him the late warning, “Don’t come here!”

It is a moonlight night, but the moon, being past the full, is only now rising over the great wilderness of London. The stars are shining as they shone above the turret-leads at Chesney Wold. This woman, as he has of late been so accustomed to call her, looks out upon them. Her soul is turbulent within her; she is sick at heart and restless. The large rooms are too cramped and close. She cannot endure their restraint and will walk alone in a neighbouring garden.

Too capricious and imperious in all she does to be the cause of much surprise in those about her as to anything she does, this woman, loosely muffled, goes out into the moonlight. Mercury attends with the key. Having opened the garden-gate, he delivers the key into his Lady’s hands at her request and is bidden to go back. She will walk there some time to ease her aching head. She may be an hour, she may be more. She needs no further

escort. The gate shuts upon its spring with a clash, and he leaves her passing on into the dark shade of some trees.

A fine night, and a bright large moon, and multitudes of stars. Mr. Tulkinghorn, in repairing to his cellar and in opening and shutting those resounding doors, has to cross a little prison-like yard. He looks up casually, thinking what a fine night, what a bright large moon, what multitudes of stars! A quiet night, too.

A very quiet night. When the moon shines very brilliantly, a solitude and stillness seem to proceed from her that influence even crowded places full of life. Not only is it a still night on dusty high roads and on hill-summits, whence a wide expanse of country may be seen in repose, quieter and quieter as it spreads away into a fringe of trees against the sky with the grey ghost of a bloom upon them; not only is it a still night in gardens and in woods, and on the river where the water-meadows are fresh and green, and the stream sparkles on among pleasant islands, murmuring weirs, and whispering rushes; not only does the stillness attend it as it flows where houses cluster thick, where many bridges are reflected in it, where wharves and shipping make it black and awful, where it winds from these disfigurements through marshes whose grim beacons stand like skeletons washed ashore, where it expands through the bolder region of rising grounds, rich in cornfield wind-mill and steeple, and where it mingles with the ever-heaving sea; not only is it a still night on the deep, and on the shore where the watcher stands to see the ship with her spread wings cross the path of light that appears to be presented to only him; but even on this stranger’s wilderness of London there is some rest. Its steeples and towers and its one great dome grow more ethereal; its smoky house-tops lose their grossness in the pale effulgence; the noises that arise from the streets are fewer and are softened, and the footsteps on the pavements pass more tranquilly away. In these fields of Mr. Tulkinghorn’s inhabiting, where the shepherds play on Chancery pipes that have no stop, and keep their sheep in the fold by hook and by crook until they have shorn them exceeding close, every noise is merged, this moonlight night, into a distant ringing hum, as if the city were a vast glass, vibrating.

What’s that? Who fired a gun or pistol? Where was it?

The few foot-passengers start, stop, and stare about them. Some windows and doors are opened, and people come out to look. It was a loud

report and echoed and rattled heavily. It shook one house, or so a man says who was passing. It has aroused all the dogs in the neighbourhood, who bark vehemently. Terrified cats scamper across the road. While the dogs are yet barking and howling—there is one dog howling like a demon—the church-clocks, as if they were startled too, begin to strike. The hum from the streets, likewise, seems to swell into a shout. But it is soon over. Before the last clock begins to strike ten, there is a lull. When it has ceased, the fine night, the bright large moon, and multitudes of stars, are left at peace again.

Has Mr. Tulkinghorn been disturbed? His windows are dark and quiet, and his door is shut. It must be something unusual indeed to bring him out of his shell. Nothing is heard of him, nothing is seen of him. What power of cannon might it take to shake that rusty old man out of his immovable composure?

For many years the persistent Roman has been pointing, with no particular meaning, from that ceiling. It is not likely that he has any new meaning in him to-night. Once pointing, always pointing—like any Roman, or even Briton, with a single idea. There he is, no doubt, in his impossible attitude, pointing, unavailingly, all night long. Moonlight, darkness, dawn, sunrise, day. There he is still, eagerly pointing, and no one minds him.

But a little after the coming of the day come people to clean the rooms. And either the Roman has some new meaning in him, not expressed before, or the foremost of them goes wild, for looking up at his outstretched hand and looking down at what is below it, that person shrieks and flies. The others, looking in as the first one looked, shriek and fly too, and there is an alarm in the street.

What does it mean? No light is admitted into the darkened chamber, and people unaccustomed to it enter, and treading softly but heavily, carry a weight into the bedroom and lay it down. There is whispering and wondering all day, strict search of every corner, careful tracing of steps, and careful noting of the disposition of every article of furniture. All eyes look up at the Roman, and all voices murmur, “If he could only tell what he saw!”

He is pointing at a table with a bottle (nearly full of wine) and a glass upon it and two candles that were blown out suddenly soon after being lighted. He is pointing at an empty chair and at a stain upon the ground before it that might be almost covered with a hand. These objects lie

directly within his range. An excited imagination might suppose that there was something in them so terrific as to drive the rest of the composition, not only the attendant big-legged boys, but the clouds and flowers and pillars too—in short, the very body and soul of Allegory, and all the brains it has—stark mad. It happens surely that every one who comes into the darkened room and looks at these things looks up at the Roman and that he is invested in all eyes with mystery and awe, as if he were a paralysed dumb witness.

So it shall happen surely, through many years to come, that ghostly stories shall be told of the stain upon the floor, so easy to be covered, so hard to be got out, and that the Roman, pointing from the ceiling shall point, so long as dust and damp and spiders spare him, with far greater significance than he ever had in Mr. Tulkinghorn's time, and with a deadly meaning. For Mr. Tulkinghorn's time is over for evermore, and the Roman pointed at the murderous hand uplifted against his life, and pointed helplessly at him, from night to morning, lying face downward on the floor, shot through the heart.

CHAPTER XLIX

Dutiful Friendship

A GREAT ANNUAL OCCASION has come round in the establishment of Mr. Matthew Bagnet, otherwise Lignum Vitae, ex-artilleryman and present bassoon-player. An occasion of feasting and festival. The celebration of a birthday in the family.

It is not Mr. Bagnet's birthday. Mr. Bagnet merely distinguishes that epoch in the musical instrument business by kissing the children with an extra smack before breakfast, smoking an additional pipe after dinner, and wondering towards evening what his poor old mother is thinking about it—a subject of infinite speculation, and rendered so by his mother having departed this life twenty years. Some men rarely revert to their father, but seem, in the bank-books of their remembrance, to have transferred all the stock of filial affection into their mother's name. Mr. Bagnet is one of these. Perhaps his exalted appreciation of the merits of the old girl causes him usually to make the noun-substantive "goodness" of the feminine gender.

It is not the birthday of one of the three children. Those occasions are kept with some marks of distinction, but they rarely overleap the bounds of happy returns and a pudding. On young Woolwich's last birthday, Mr. Bagnet certainly did, after observing on his growth and general advancement, proceed, in a moment of profound reflection on the changes wrought by time, to examine him in the catechism, accomplishing with extreme accuracy the questions number one and two, "What is your name?" and "Who gave you that name?" but there failing in the exact precision of his memory and substituting for number three the question "And how do you like that name?" which he propounded with a sense of its importance, in itself so edifying and improving as to give it quite an orthodox air. This, however, was a speciality on that particular birthday, and not a general solemnity.

It is the old girl's birthday, and that is the greatest holiday and reddest-letter day in Mr. Bagnet's calendar. The auspicious event is always

commemorated according to certain forms settled and prescribed by Mr. Bagnet some years since. Mr. Bagnet, being deeply convinced that to have a pair of fowls for dinner is to attain the highest pitch of imperial luxury, invariably goes forth himself very early in the morning of this day to buy a pair; he is, as invariably, taken in by the vendor and installed in the possession of the oldest inhabitants of any coop in Europe. Returning with these triumphs of toughness tied up in a clean blue and white cotton handkerchief (essential to the arrangements), he in a casual manner invites Mrs. Bagnet to declare at breakfast what she would like for dinner. Mrs. Bagnet, by a coincidence never known to fail, replying fowls, Mr. Bagnet instantly produces his bundle from a place of concealment amidst general amazement and rejoicing. He further requires that the old girl shall do nothing all day long but sit in her very best gown and be served by himself and the young people. As he is not illustrious for his cookery, this may be supposed to be a matter of state rather than enjoyment on the old girl's part, but she keeps her state with all imaginable cheerfulness.

On this present birthday, Mr. Bagnet has accomplished the usual preliminaries. He has bought two specimens of poultry, which, if there be any truth in adages, were certainly not caught with chaff, to be prepared for the spit; he has amazed and rejoiced the family by their unlooked-for production; he is himself directing the roasting of the poultry; and Mrs. Bagnet, with her wholesome brown fingers itching to prevent what she sees going wrong, sits in her gown of ceremony, an honoured guest.

Quebec and Malta lay the cloth for dinner, while Woolwich, serving, as beseems him, under his father, keeps the fowls revolving. To these young scullions Mrs. Bagnet occasionally imparts a wink, or a shake of the head, or a crooked face, as they made mistakes.

"At half after one." Says Mr. Bagnet. "To the minute. They'll be done."

Mrs. Bagnet, with anguish, beholds one of them at a standstill before the fire and beginning to burn.

"You shall have a dinner, old girl," says Mr. Bagnet. "Fit for a queen."

Mrs. Bagnet shows her white teeth cheerfully, but to the perception of her son, betrays so much uneasiness of spirit that he is impelled by the dictates of affection to ask her, with his eyes, what is the matter, thus standing, with his eyes wide open, more oblivious of the fowls than before, and not affording the least hope of a return to consciousness. Fortunately

his elder sister perceives the cause of the agitation in Mrs. Bagnet's breast and with an admonitory poke recalls him. The stopped fowls going round again, Mrs. Bagnet closes her eyes in the intensity of her relief.

"George will look us up," says Mr. Bagnet. "At half after four. To the moment. How many years, old girl. Has George looked us up. This afternoon?"

"Ah, Lignum, Lignum, as many as make an old woman of a young one, I begin to think. Just about that, and no less," returns Mrs. Bagnet, laughing and shaking her head.

"Old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, "never mind. You'd be as young as ever you was. If you wasn't younger. Which you are. As everybody knows."

Quebec and Malta here exclaim, with clapping of hands, that Bluffy is sure to bring mother something, and begin to speculate on what it will be.

"Do you know, Lignum," says Mrs. Bagnet, casting a glance on the table-cloth, and winking "salt!" at Malta with her right eye, and shaking the pepper away from Quebec with her head, "I begin to think George is in the roving way again.

"George," returns Mr. Bagnet, "will never desert. And leave his old comrade. In the lurch. Don't be afraid of it."

"No, Lignum. No. I don't say he will. I don't think he will. But if he could get over this money trouble of his, I believe he would be off."

Mr. Bagnet asks why.

"Well," returns his wife, considering, "George seems to me to be getting not a little impatient and restless. I don't say but what he's as free as ever. Of course he must be free or he wouldn't be George, but he smarts and seems put out."

"He's extra-drilled," says Mr. Bagnet. "By a lawyer. Who would put the devil out."

"There's something in that," his wife assents; "but so it is, Lignum."

Further conversation is prevented, for the time, by the necessity under which Mr. Bagnet finds himself of directing the whole force of his mind to the dinner, which is a little endangered by the dry humour of the fowls in not yielding any gravy, and also by the made gravy acquiring no flavour and turning out of a flaxen complexion. With a similar perverseness, the potatoes crumble off forks in the process of peeling, upheaving from their centres in every direction, as if they were subject to earthquakes. The legs

of the fowls, too, are longer than could be desired, and extremely scaly. Overcoming these disadvantages to the best of his ability, Mr. Bagnet at last dishes and they sit down at table, Mrs. Bagnet occupying the guest's place at his right hand.

It is well for the old girl that she has but one birthday in a year, for two such indulgences in poultry might be injurious. Every kind of finer tendon and ligament that is in the nature of poultry to possess is developed in these specimens in the singular form of guitar-strings. Their limbs appear to have struck roots into their breasts and bodies, as aged trees strike roots into the earth. Their legs are so hard as to encourage the idea that they must have devoted the greater part of their long and arduous lives to pedestrian exercises and the walking of matches. But Mr. Bagnet, unconscious of these little defects, sets his heart on Mrs. Bagnet eating a most severe quantity of the delicacies before her; and as that good old girl would not cause him a moment's disappointment on any day, least of all on such a day, for any consideration, she imperils her digestion fearfully. How young Woolwich cleans the drum-sticks without being of ostrich descent, his anxious mother is at a loss to understand.

The old girl has another trial to undergo after the conclusion of the repast in sitting in state to see the room cleared, the hearth swept, and the dinner-service washed up and polished in the backyard. The great delight and energy with which the two young ladies apply themselves to these duties, turning up their skirts in imitation of their mother and skating in and out on little scaffolds of pattens, inspire the highest hopes for the future, but some anxiety for the present. The same causes lead to confusion of tongues, a clattering of crockery, a rattling of tin mugs, a whisking of brooms, and an expenditure of water, all in excess, while the saturation of the young ladies themselves is almost too moving a spectacle for Mrs. Bagnet to look upon with the calmness proper to her position. At last the various cleansing processes are triumphantly completed; Quebec and Malta appear in fresh attire, smiling and dry; pipes, tobacco, and something to drink are placed upon the table; and the old girl enjoys the first peace of mind she ever knows on the day of this delightful entertainment.

When Mr. Bagnet takes his usual seat, the hands of the clock are very near to half-past four; as they mark it accurately, Mr. Bagnet announces, "George! Military time."

It is George, and he has hearty congratulations for the old girl (whom he kisses on the great occasion), and for the children, and for Mr. Bagnet. “Happy returns to all!” says Mr. George.

“But, George, old man!” cries Mrs. Bagnet, looking at him curiously. “What’s come to you?”

“Come to me?”

“Ah! You are so white, George—for you—and look so shocked. Now don’t he, Lignum?”

“George,” says Mr. Bagnet, “tell the old girl. What’s the matter.”

“I didn’t know I looked white,” says the trooper, passing his hand over his brow, “and I didn’t know I looked shocked, and I’m sorry I do. But the truth is, that boy who was taken in at my place died yesterday afternoon, and it has rather knocked me over.”

“Poor creetur!” says Mrs. Bagnet with a mother’s pity. “Is he gone? Dear, dear!”

“I didn’t mean to say anything about it, for it’s not birthday talk, but you have got it out of me, you see, before I sit down. I should have roused up in a minute,” says the trooper, making himself speak more gaily, “but you’re so quick, Mrs. Bagnet.”

“You’re right. The old girl,” says Mr. Bagnet. “Is as quick. As powder.”

“And what’s more, she’s the subject of the day, and we’ll stick to her,” cries Mr. George. “See here, I have brought a little brooch along with me. It’s a poor thing, you know, but it’s a keepsake. That’s all the good it is, Mrs. Bagnet.”

Mr. George produces his present, which is greeted with admiring leapings and clappings by the young family, and with a species of reverential admiration by Mr. Bagnet. “Old girl,” says Mr. Bagnet. “Tell him my opinion of it.”

“Why, it’s a wonder, George!” Mrs. Bagnet exclaims. “It’s the beautifullest thing that ever was seen!”

“Good!” says Mr. Bagnet. “My opinion.”

“It’s so pretty, George,” cries Mrs. Bagnet, turning it on all sides and holding it out at arm’s length, “that it seems too choice for me.”

“Bad!” says Mr. Bagnet. “Not my opinion.”

“But whatever it is, a hundred thousand thanks, old fellow,” says Mrs. Bagnet, her eyes sparkling with pleasure and her hand stretched out to him;

“and though I have been a crossgrained soldier’s wife to you sometimes, George, we are as strong friends, I am sure, in reality, as ever can be. Now you shall fasten it on yourself, for good luck, if you will, George.”

The children close up to see it done, and Mr. Bagnet looks over young Woolwich’s head to see it done with an interest so maturely wooden, yet pleasantly childish, that Mrs. Bagnet cannot help laughing in her airy way and saying, “Oh, Lignum, Lignum, what a precious old chap you are!” But the trooper fails to fasten the brooch. His hand shakes, he is nervous, and it falls off. “Would any one believe this?” says he, catching it as it drops and looking round. “I am so out of sorts that I bungle at an easy job like this!”

Mrs. Bagnet concludes that for such a case there is no remedy like a pipe, and fastening the brooch herself in a twinkling, causes the trooper to be inducted into his usual snug place and the pipes to be got into action. “If that don’t bring you round, George,” says she, “just throw your eye across here at your present now and then, and the two together MUST do it.”

“You ought to do it of yourself,” George answers; “I know that very well, Mrs. Bagnet. I’ll tell you how, one way and another, the blues have got to be too many for me. Here was this poor lad. ’Twas dull work to see him dying as he did, and not be able to help him.”

“What do you mean, George? You did help him. You took him under your roof.”

“I helped him so far, but that’s little. I mean, Mrs. Bagnet, there he was, dying without ever having been taught much more than to know his right hand from his left. And he was too far gone to be helped out of that.”

“Ah, poor creetur!” says Mrs. Bagnet.

“Then,” says the trooper, not yet lighting his pipe, and passing his heavy hand over his hair, “that brought up Gridley in a man’s mind. His was a bad case too, in a different way. Then the two got mixed up in a man’s mind with a flinty old rascal who had to do with both. And to think of that rusty carbine, stock and barrel, standing up on end in his corner, hard, indifferent, taking everything so evenly—it made flesh and blood tingle, I do assure you.”

“My advice to you,” returns Mrs. Bagnet, “is to light your pipe and tingle that way. It’s wholesomer and comfortabler, and better for the health altogether.”

“You’re right,” says the trooper, “and I’ll do it.”

So he does it, though still with an indignant gravity that impresses the young Bagnets, and even causes Mr. Bagnet to defer the ceremony of drinking Mrs. Bagnet's health, always given by himself on these occasions in a speech of exemplary terseness. But the young ladies having composed what Mr. Bagnet is in the habit of calling "the mixtur," and George's pipe being now in a glow, Mr. Bagnet considers it his duty to proceed to the toast of the evening. He addresses the assembled company in the following terms.

"George. Woolwich. Quebec. Malta. This is her birthday. Take a day's march. And you won't find such another. Here's towards her!"

The toast having been drunk with enthusiasm, Mrs. Bagnet returns thanks in a neat address of corresponding brevity. This model composition is limited to the three words "And wishing yours!" which the old girl follows up with a nod at everybody in succession and a well-regulated swig of the mixture. This she again follows up, on the present occasion, by the wholly unexpected exclamation, "Here's a man!"

Here IS a man, much to the astonishment of the little company, looking in at the parlour-door. He is a sharp-eyed man—a quick keen man—and he takes in everybody's look at him, all at once, individually and collectively, in a manner that stamps him a remarkable man.

"George," says the man, nodding, "how do you find yourself?"

"Why, it's Bucket!" cries Mr. George.

"Yes," says the man, coming in and closing the door. "I was going down the street here when I happened to stop and look in at the musical instruments in the shop-window—a friend of mine is in want of a second-hand wiolinceller of a good tone—and I saw a party enjoying themselves, and I thought it was you in the corner; I thought I couldn't be mistaken. How goes the world with you, George, at the present moment? Pretty smooth? And with you, ma'am? And with you, governor? And Lord," says Mr. Bucket, opening his arms, "here's children too! You may do anything with me if you only show me children. Give us a kiss, my pets. No occasion to inquire who YOUR father and mother is. Never saw such a likeness in my life!"

Mr. Bucket, not unwelcome, has sat himself down next to Mr. George and taken Quebec and Malta on his knees. "You pretty dears," says Mr. Bucket, "give us another kiss; it's the only thing I'm greedy in. Lord bless

you, how healthy you look! And what may be the ages of these two, ma’am? I should put ’em down at the figures of about eight and ten.”

“You’re very near, sir,” says Mrs. Bagnet.

“I generally am near,” returns Mr. Bucket, “being so fond of children. A friend of mine has had nineteen of ’em, ma’am, all by one mother, and she’s still as fresh and rosy as the morning. Not so much so as yourself, but, upon my soul, she comes near you! And what do you call these, my darling?” pursues Mr. Bucket, pinching Malta’s cheeks. “These are peaches, these are. Bless your heart! And what do you think about father? Do you think father could recommend a second-hand wiolinceller of a good tone for Mr. Bucket’s friend, my dear? My name’s Bucket. Ain’t that a funny name?”

These blandishments have entirely won the family heart. Mrs. Bagnet forgets the day to the extent of filling a pipe and a glass for Mr. Bucket and waiting upon him hospitably. She would be glad to receive so pleasant a character under any circumstances, but she tells him that as a friend of George’s she is particularly glad to see him this evening, for George has not been in his usual spirits.

“Not in his usual spirits?” exclaims Mr. Bucket. “Why, I never heard of such a thing! What’s the matter, George? You don’t intend to tell me you’ve been out of spirits. What should you be out of spirits for? You haven’t got anything on your mind, you know.”

“Nothing particular,” returns the trooper.

“I should think not,” rejoins Mr. Bucket. “What could you have on your mind, you know! And have these pets got anything on THEIR minds, eh? Not they, but they’ll be upon the minds of some of the young fellows, some of these days, and make ’em precious low-spirited. I ain’t much of a prophet, but I can tell you that, ma’am.”

Mrs. Bagnet, quite charmed, hopes Mr. Bucket has a family of his own.

“There, ma’am!” says Mr. Bucket. “Would you believe it? No, I haven’t. My wife and a lodger constitute my family. Mrs. Bucket is as fond of children as myself and as wishful to have ’em, but no. So it is. Worldly goods are divided unequally, and man must not repine. What a very nice backyard, ma’am! Any way out of that yard, now?”

There is no way out of that yard.

“Ain’t there really?” says Mr. Bucket. “I should have thought there might have been. Well, I don’t know as I ever saw a backyard that took my

fancy more. Would you allow me to look at it? Thank you. No, I see there's no way out. But what a very good-proportioned yard it is!"

Having cast his sharp eye all about it, Mr. Bucket returns to his chair next his friend Mr. George and pats Mr. George affectionately on the shoulder.

"How are your spirits now, George?"

"All right now," returns the trooper.

"That's your sort!" says Mr. Bucket. "Why should you ever have been otherwise? A man of your fine figure and constitution has no right to be out of spirits. That ain't a chest to be out of spirits, is it, ma'am? And you haven't got anything on your mind, you know, George; what could you have on your mind!"

Somewhat harping on this phrase, considering the extent and variety of his conversational powers, Mr. Bucket twice or thrice repeats it to the pipe he lights, and with a listening face that is particularly his own. But the sun of his sociality soon recovers from this brief eclipse and shines again.

"And this is brother, is it, my dears?" says Mr. Bucket, referring to Quebec and Malta for information on the subject of young Woolwich. "And a nice brother he is—half-brother I mean to say. For he's too old to be your boy, ma'am."

"I can certify at all events that he is not anybody else's," returns Mrs. Bagnet, laughing.

"Well, you do surprise me! Yet he's like you, there's no denying. Lord, he's wonderfully like you! But about what you may call the brow, you know, THERE his father comes out!" Mr. Bucket compares the faces with one eye shut up, while Mr. Bagnet smokes in stolid satisfaction.

This is an opportunity for Mrs. Bagnet to inform him that the boy is George's godson.

"George's godson, is he?" rejoins Mr. Bucket with extreme cordiality. "I must shake hands over again with George's godson. Godfather and godson do credit to one another. And what do you intend to make of him, ma'am? Does he show any turn for any musical instrument?"

Mr. Bagnet suddenly interposes, "Plays the fife. Beautiful."

"Would you believe it, governor," says Mr. Bucket, struck by the coincidence, "that when I was a boy I played the fife myself? Not in a scientific way, as I expect he does, but by ear. Lord bless you! 'British

Grenadiers'—there's a tune to warm an Englishman up! COULD you give us 'British Grenadiers,' my fine fellow?"

Nothing could be more acceptable to the little circle than this call upon young Woolwich, who immediately fetches his fife and performs the stirring melody, during which performance Mr. Bucket, much enlivened, beats time and never fails to come in sharp with the burden, "British Gra-a-anadeers!" In short, he shows so much musical taste that Mr. Bagnet actually takes his pipe from his lips to express his conviction that he is a singer. Mr. Bucket receives the harmonious impeachment so modestly, confessing how that he did once chaunt a little, for the expression of the feelings of his own bosom, and with no presumptuous idea of entertaining his friends, that he is asked to sing. Not to be behindhand in the sociality of the evening, he complies and gives them "Believe Me, if All Those Endearing Young Charms." This ballad, he informs Mrs. Bagnet, he considers to have been his most powerful ally in moving the heart of Mrs. Bucket when a maiden, and inducing her to approach the altar—Mr. Bucket's own words are "to come up to the scratch."

This sparkling stranger is such a new and agreeable feature in the evening that Mr. George, who testified no great emotions of pleasure on his entrance, begins, in spite of himself, to be rather proud of him. He is so friendly, is a man of so many resources, and so easy to get on with, that it is something to have made him known there. Mr. Bagnet becomes, after another pipe, so sensible of the value of his acquaintance that he solicits the honour of his company on the old girl's next birthday. If anything can more closely cement and consolidate the esteem which Mr. Bucket has formed for the family, it is the discovery of the nature of the occasion. He drinks to Mrs. Bagnet with a warmth approaching to rapture, engages himself for that day twelvemonth more than thankfully, makes a memorandum of the day in a large black pocket-book with a girdle to it, and breathes a hope that Mrs. Bucket and Mrs. Bagnet may before then become, in a manner, sisters. As he says himself, what is public life without private ties? He is in his humble way a public man, but it is not in that sphere that he finds happiness. No, it must be sought within the confines of domestic bliss.

It is natural, under these circumstances, that he, in his turn, should remember the friend to whom he is indebted for so promising an acquaintance. And he does. He keeps very close to him. Whatever the

subject of the conversation, he keeps a tender eye upon him. He waits to walk home with him. He is interested in his very boots and observes even them attentively as Mr. George sits smoking cross-legged in the chimney-corner.

At length Mr. George rises to depart. At the same moment Mr. Bucket, with the secret sympathy of friendship, also rises. He dotes upon the children to the last and remembers the commission he has undertaken for an absent friend.

"Respecting that second-hand wiolinceller, governor—could you recommend me such a thing?"

"Scores," says Mr. Bagnet.

"I am obliged to you," returns Mr. Bucket, squeezing his hand. "You're a friend in need. A good tone, mind you! My friend is a regular dab at it. Ecod, he saws away at Mozart and Handel and the rest of the big-wigs like a thorough workman. And you needn't," says Mr. Bucket in a considerate and private voice, "you needn't commit yourself to too low a figure, governor. I don't want to pay too large a price for my friend, but I want you to have your proper percentage and be remunerated for your loss of time. That is but fair. Every man must live, and ought to it."

Mr. Bagnet shakes his head at the old girl to the effect that they have found a jewel of price.

"Suppose I was to give you a look in, say, at half arter ten to-morrow morning. Perhaps you could name the figures of a few wiolincellers of a good tone?" says Mr. Bucket.

Nothing easier. Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet both engage to have the requisite information ready and even hint to each other at the practicability of having a small stock collected there for approval.

"Thank you," says Mr. Bucket, "thank you. Good night, ma'am. Good night, governor. Good night, darlings. I am much obliged to you for one of the pleasantest evenings I ever spent in my life."

They, on the contrary, are much obliged to him for the pleasure he has given them in his company; and so they part with many expressions of goodwill on both sides. "Now George, old boy," says Mr. Bucket, taking his arm at the shop-door, "come along!" As they go down the little street and the Bagnets pause for a minute looking after them, Mrs. Bagnet remarks to the worthy Lignum that Mr. Bucket "almost clings to George like, and

seems to be really fond of him."

The neighbouring streets being narrow and ill-paved, it is a little inconvenient to walk there two abreast and arm in arm. Mr. George therefore soon proposes to walk singly. But Mr. Bucket, who cannot make up his mind to relinquish his friendly hold, replies, "Wait half a minute, George. I should wish to speak to you first." Immediately afterwards, he twists him into a public-house and into a parlour, where he confronts him and claps his own back against the door.

"Now, George," says Mr. Bucket, "duty is duty, and friendship is friendship. I never want the two to clash if I can help it. I have endeavoured to make things pleasant to-night, and I put it to you whether I have done it or not. You must consider yourself in custody, George."

"Custody? What for?" returns the trooper, thunderstruck.

"Now, George," says Mr. Bucket, urging a sensible view of the case upon him with his fat forefinger, "duty, as you know very well, is one thing, and conversation is another. It's my duty to inform you that any observations you may make will be liable to be used against you. Therefore, George, be careful what you say. You don't happen to have heard of a murder?"

"Murder!"

"Now, George," says Mr. Bucket, keeping his forefinger in an impressive state of action, "bear in mind what I've said to you. I ask you nothing. You've been in low spirits this afternoon. I say, you don't happen to have heard of a murder?"

"No. Where has there been a murder?"

"Now, George," says Mr. Bucket, "don't you go and commit yourself. I'm a-going to tell you what I want you for. There has been a murder in Lincoln's Inn Fields—gentleman of the name of Tulkinghorn. He was shot last night. I want you for that."

The trooper sinks upon a seat behind him, and great drops start out upon his forehead, and a deadly pallor overspreads his face.

"Bucket! It's not possible that Mr. Tulkinghorn has been killed and that you suspect ME?"

"George," returns Mr. Bucket, keeping his forefinger going, "it is certainly possible, because it's the case. This deed was done last night at ten o'clock. Now, you know where you were last night at ten o'clock, and

you'll be able to prove it, no doubt."

"Last night! Last night?" repeats the trooper thoughtfully. Then it flashes upon him. "Why, great heaven, I was there last night!"

"So I have understood, George," returns Mr. Bucket with great deliberation. "So I have understood. Likewise you've been very often there. You've been seen hanging about the place, and you've been heard more than once in a wrangle with him, and it's possible—I don't say it's certainly so, mind you, but it's possible—that he may have been heard to call you a threatening, murdering, dangerous fellow."

The trooper gasps as if he would admit it all if he could speak.

"Now, George," continues Mr. Bucket, putting his hat upon the table with an air of business rather in the upholstery way than otherwise, "my wish is, as it has been all the evening, to make things pleasant. I tell you plainly there's a reward out, of a hundred guineas, offered by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. You and me have always been pleasant together; but I have got a duty to discharge; and if that hundred guineas is to be made, it may as well be made by me as any other man. On all of which accounts, I should hope it was clear to you that I must have you, and that I'm damned if I don't have you. Am I to call in any assistance, or is the trick done?"

Mr. George has recovered himself and stands up like a soldier. "Come," he says; "I am ready."

"George," continues Mr. Bucket, "wait a bit!" With his upholsterer manner, as if the trooper were a window to be fitted up, he takes from his pocket a pair of handcuffs. "This is a serious charge, George, and such is my duty."

The trooper flushes angrily and hesitates a moment, but holds out his two hands, clasped together, and says, "There! Put them on!"

Mr. Bucket adjusts them in a moment. "How do you find them? Are they comfortable? If not, say so, for I wish to make things as pleasant as is consistent with my duty, and I've got another pair in my pocket." This remark he offers like a most respectable tradesman anxious to execute an order neatly and to the perfect satisfaction of his customer. "They'll do as they are? Very well! Now, you see, George"—he takes a cloak from a corner and begins adjusting it about the trooper's neck—"I was mindful of your feelings when I come out, and brought this on purpose. There! Who's the wiser?"

“Only I,” returns the trooper, “but as I know it, do me one more good turn and pull my hat over my eyes.”

“Really, though! Do you mean it? Ain’t it a pity? It looks so.”

“I can’t look chance men in the face with these things on,” Mr. George hurriedly replies. “Do, for God’s sake, pull my hat forward.”

So strongly entreated, Mr. Bucket complies, puts his own hat on, and conducts his prize into the streets, the trooper marching on as steadily as usual, though with his head less erect, and Mr. Bucket steering him with his elbow over the crossings and up the turnings.

CHAPTER L

Esther’s Narrative

IT HAPPENED THAT WHEN I came home from Deal I found a note from Caddy Jellyby (as we always continued to call her), informing me that her health, which had been for some time very delicate, was worse and that she would be more glad than she could tell me if I would go to see her. It was a note of a few lines, written from the couch on which she lay and enclosed to me in another from her husband, in which he seconded her entreaty with much solicitude. Caddy was now the mother, and I the godmother, of such a poor little baby—such a tiny old-faced mite, with a countenance that seemed to be scarcely anything but cap-border, and a little lean, long-fingered hand, always clenched under its chin. It would lie in this attitude all day, with its bright specks of eyes open, wondering (as I used to imagine) how it came to be so small and weak. Whenever it was moved it cried, but at all other times it was so patient that the sole desire of its life appeared to be to lie quiet and think. It had curious little dark veins in its face and curious little dark marks under its eyes like faint remembrances of poor Caddy’s inky days, and altogether, to those who were not used to it, it was quite a piteous little sight.

But it was enough for Caddy that SHE was used to it. The projects with which she beguiled her illness, for little Esther’s education, and little Esther’s marriage, and even for her own old age as the grandmother of little Esther’s little Esthers, was so prettily expressive of devotion to this pride of her life that I should be tempted to recall some of them but for the timely remembrance that I am getting on irregularly as it is.

To return to the letter. Caddy had a superstition about me which had been strengthening in her mind ever since that night long ago when she had lain asleep with her head in my lap. She almost—I think I must say quite—believed that I did her good whenever I was near her. Now although this was such a fancy of the affectionate girl’s that I am almost ashamed to mention it, still it might have all the force of a fact when she was really ill.

Therefore I set off to Caddy, with my guardian's consent, post-haste; and she and Prince made so much of me that there never was anything like it.

Next day I went again to sit with her, and next day I went again. It was a very easy journey, for I had only to rise a little earlier in the morning, and keep my accounts, and attend to housekeeping matters before leaving home.

But when I had made these three visits, my guardian said to me, on my return at night, "Now, little woman, little woman, this will never do. Constant dropping will wear away a stone, and constant coaching will wear out a Dame Durden. We will go to London for a while and take possession of our old lodgings."

"Not for me, dear guardian," said I, "for I never feel tired," which was strictly true. I was only too happy to be in such request.

"For me then," returned my guardian, "or for Ada, or for both of us. It is somebody's birthday to-morrow, I think."

"Truly I think it is," said I, kissing my darling, who would be twenty-one to-morrow.

"Well," observed my guardian, half pleasantly, half seriously, "that's a great occasion and will give my fair cousin some necessary business to transact in assertion of her independence, and will make London a more convenient place for all of us. So to London we will go. That being settled, there is another thing—how have you left Caddy?"

"Very unwell, guardian. I fear it will be some time before she regains her health and strength."

"What do you call some time, now?" asked my guardian thoughtfully.

"Some weeks, I am afraid."

"Ah!" He began to walk about the room with his hands in his pockets, showing that he had been thinking as much. "Now, what do you say about her doctor? Is he a good doctor, my love?"

I felt obliged to confess that I knew nothing to the contrary but that Prince and I had agreed only that evening that we would like his opinion to be confirmed by some one.

"Well, you know," returned my guardian quickly, "there's Woodcourt."

I had not meant that, and was rather taken by surprise. For a moment all that I had had in my mind in connexion with Mr. Woodcourt seemed to come back and confuse me.

"You don't object to him, little woman?"

“Object to him, guardian? Oh no!”

“And you don’t think the patient would object to him?”

So far from that, I had no doubt of her being prepared to have a great reliance on him and to like him very much. I said that he was no stranger to her personally, for she had seen him often in his kind attendance on Miss Flite.

“Very good,” said my guardian. “He has been here to-day, my dear, and I will see him about it to-morrow.”

I felt in this short conversation—though I did not know how, for she was quiet, and we interchanged no look—that my dear girl well remembered how merrily she had clasped me round the waist when no other hands than Caddy’s had brought me the little parting token. This caused me to feel that I ought to tell her, and Caddy too, that I was going to be the mistress of Bleak House and that if I avoided that disclosure any longer I might become less worthy in my own eyes of its master’s love. Therefore, when we went upstairs and had waited listening until the clock struck twelve in order that only I might be the first to wish my darling all good wishes on her birthday and to take her to my heart, I set before her, just as I had set before myself, the goodness and honour of her cousin John and the happy life that was in store for me. If ever my darling were fonder of me at one time than another in all our intercourse, she was surely fondest of me that night. And I was so rejoiced to know it and so comforted by the sense of having done right in casting this last idle reservation away that I was ten times happier than I had been before. I had scarcely thought it a reservation a few hours ago, but now that it was gone I felt as if I understood its nature better.

Next day we went to London. We found our old lodging vacant, and in half an hour were quietly established there, as if we had never gone away. Mr. Woodcourt dined with us to celebrate my darling’s birthday, and we were as pleasant as we could be with the great blank among us that Richard’s absence naturally made on such an occasion. After that day I was for some weeks—eight or nine as I remember—very much with Caddy, and thus it fell out that I saw less of Ada at this time than any other since we had first come together, except the time of my own illness. She often came to Caddy’s, but our function there was to amuse and cheer her, and we did not talk in our usual confidential manner. Whenever I went home at night we were together, but Caddy’s rest was broken by pain, and I often

remained to nurse her.

With her husband and her poor little mite of a baby to love and their home to strive for, what a good creature Caddy was! So self-denying, so uncomplaining, so anxious to get well on their account, so afraid of giving trouble, and so thoughtful of the unassisted labours of her husband and the comforts of old Mr. Turveydrop; I had never known the best of her until now. And it seemed so curious that her pale face and helpless figure should be lying there day after day where dancing was the business of life, where the kit and the apprentices began early every morning in the ball-room, and where the untidy little boy waltzed by himself in the kitchen all the afternoon.

At Caddy's request I took the supreme direction of her apartment, trimmed it up, and pushed her, couch and all, into a lighter and more airy and more cheerful corner than she had yet occupied; then, every day, when we were in our neatest array, I used to lay my small small namesake in her arms and sit down to chat or work or read to her. It was at one of the first of these quiet times that I told Caddy about Bleak House.

We had other visitors besides Ada. First of all we had Prince, who in his hurried intervals of teaching used to come softly in and sit softly down, with a face of loving anxiety for Caddy and the very little child. Whatever Caddy's condition really was, she never failed to declare to Prince that she was all but well—which I, heaven forgive me, never failed to confirm. This would put Prince in such good spirits that he would sometimes take the kit from his pocket and play a chord or two to astonish the baby, which I never knew it to do in the least degree, for my tiny namesake never noticed it at all.

Then there was Mrs. Jellyby. She would come occasionally, with her usual distraught manner, and sit calmly looking miles beyond her grandchild as if her attention were absorbed by a young Borrioboolan on its native shores. As bright-eyed as ever, as serene, and as untidy, she would say, "Well, Caddy, child, and how do you do to-day?" And then would sit amiably smiling and taking no notice of the reply or would sweetly glide off into a calculation of the number of letters she had lately received and answered or of the coffee-bearing power of Borrioboola-Gha. This she would always do with a serene contempt for our limited sphere of action, not to be disguised.

Then there was old Mr. Turveydrop, who was from morning to night and from night to morning the subject of innumerable precautions. If the baby cried, it was nearly stifled lest the noise should make him uncomfortable. If the fire wanted stirring in the night, it was surreptitiously done lest his rest should be broken. If Caddy required any little comfort that the house contained, she first carefully discussed whether he was likely to require it too. In return for this consideration he would come into the room once a day, all but blessing it—showing a condescension, and a patronage, and a grace of manner in dispensing the light of his high-shouldered presence from which I might have supposed him (if I had not known better) to have been the benefactor of Caddy's life.

"My Caroline," he would say, making the nearest approach that he could to bending over her. "Tell me that you are better to-day."

"Oh, much better, thank you, Mr. Turveydrop," Caddy would reply.

"Delighted! Enchanted! And our dear Miss Summerson. She is not quite prostrated by fatigue?" Here he would crease up his eyelids and kiss his fingers to me, though I am happy to say he had ceased to be particular in his attentions since I had been so altered.

"Not at all," I would assure him.

"Charming! We must take care of our dear Caroline, Miss Summerson. We must spare nothing that will restore her. We must nourish her. My dear Caroline"—he would turn to his daughter-in-law with infinite generosity and protection—"want for nothing, my love. Frame a wish and gratify it, my daughter. Everything this house contains, everything my room contains, is at your service, my dear. Do not," he would sometimes add in a burst of deportment, "even allow my simple requirements to be considered if they should at any time interfere with your own, my Caroline. Your necessities are greater than mine."

He had established such a long prescriptive right to this deportment (his son's inheritance from his mother) that I several times knew both Caddy and her husband to be melted to tears by these affectionate self-sacrifices.

"Nay, my dears," he would remonstrate; and when I saw Caddy's thin arm about his fat neck as he said it, I would be melted too, though not by the same process. "Nay, nay! I have promised never to leave ye. Be dutiful and affectionate towards me, and I ask no other return. Now, bless ye! I am going to the Park."

He would take the air there presently and get an appetite for his hotel dinner. I hope I do old Mr. Turveydrop no wrong, but I never saw any better traits in him than these I faithfully record, except that he certainly conceived a liking for Peepy and would take the child out walking with great pomp, always on those occasions sending him home before he went to dinner himself, and occasionally with a halfpenny in his pocket. But even this disinterestedness was attended with no inconsiderable cost, to my knowledge, for before Peepy was sufficiently decorated to walk hand in hand with the professor of deportment, he had to be newly dressed, at the expense of Caddy and her husband, from top to toe.

Last of our visitors, there was Mr. Jellyby. Really when he used to come in of an evening, and ask Caddy in his meek voice how she was, and then sit down with his head against the wall, and make no attempt to say anything more, I liked him very much. If he found me bustling about doing any little thing, he sometimes half took his coat off, as if with an intention of helping by a great exertion; but he never got any further. His sole occupation was to sit with his head against the wall, looking hard at the thoughtful baby; and I could not quite divest my mind of a fancy that they understood one another.

I have not counted Mr. Woodcourt among our visitors because he was now Caddy's regular attendant. She soon began to improve under his care, but he was so gentle, so skilful, so unwearying in the pains he took that it is not to be wondered at, I am sure. I saw a good deal of Mr. Woodcourt during this time, though not so much as might be supposed, for knowing Caddy to be safe in his hands, I often slipped home at about the hours when he was expected. We frequently met, notwithstanding. I was quite reconciled to myself now, but I still felt glad to think that he was sorry for me, and he still WAS sorry for me I believed. He helped Mr. Badger in his professional engagements, which were numerous, and had as yet no settled projects for the future.

It was when Caddy began to recover that I began to notice a change in my dear girl. I cannot say how it first presented itself to me, because I observed it in many slight particulars which were nothing in themselves and only became something when they were pieced together. But I made it out, by putting them together, that Ada was not so frankly cheerful with me as she used to be. Her tenderness for me was as loving and true as ever; I did

not for a moment doubt that; but there was a quiet sorrow about her which she did not confide to me, and in which I traced some hidden regret.

Now, I could not understand this, and I was so anxious for the happiness of my own pet that it caused me some uneasiness and set me thinking often. At length, feeling sure that Ada suppressed this something from me lest it should make me unhappy too, it came into my head that she was a little grieved—for me—by what I had told her about Bleak House.

How I persuaded myself that this was likely, I don't know. I had no idea that there was any selfish reference in my doing so. I was not grieved for myself: I was quite contented and quite happy. Still, that Ada might be thinking—for me, though I had abandoned all such thoughts—of what once was, but was now all changed, seemed so easy to believe that I believed it.

What could I do to reassure my darling (I considered then) and show her that I had no such feelings? Well! I could only be as brisk and busy as possible, and that I had tried to be all along. However, as Caddy's illness had certainly interfered, more or less, with my home duties—though I had always been there in the morning to make my guardian's breakfast, and he had a hundred times laughed and said there must be two little women, for his little woman was never missing—I resolved to be doubly diligent and gay. So I went about the house humming all the tunes I knew, and I sat working and working in a desperate manner, and I talked and talked, morning, noon, and night.

And still there was the same shade between me and my darling.

"So, Dame Trot," observed my guardian, shutting up his book one night when we were all three together, "so Woodcourt has restored Caddy Jellyby to the full enjoyment of life again?"

"Yes," I said; "and to be repaid by such gratitude as hers is to be made rich, guardian."

"I wish it was," he returned, "with all my heart."

So did I too, for that matter. I said so.

"Aye! We would make him as rich as a Jew if we knew how. Would we not, little woman?"

I laughed as I worked and replied that I was not sure about that, for it might spoil him, and he might not be so useful, and there might be many who could ill spare him. As Miss Flite, and Caddy herself, and many others.

"True," said my guardian. "I had forgotten that. But we would agree to

make him rich enough to live, I suppose? Rich enough to work with tolerable peace of mind? Rich enough to have his own happy home and his own household gods—and household goddess, too, perhaps?"

That was quite another thing, I said. We must all agree in that.

"To be sure," said my guardian. "All of us. I have a great regard for Woodcourt, a high esteem for him; and I have been sounding him delicately about his plans. It is difficult to offer aid to an independent man with that just kind of pride which he possesses. And yet I would be glad to do it if I might or if I knew how. He seems half inclined for another voyage. But that appears like casting such a man away."

"It might open a new world to him," said I.

"So it might, little woman," my guardian assented. "I doubt if he expects much of the old world. Do you know I have fancied that he sometimes feels some particular disappointment or misfortune encountered in it. You never heard of anything of that sort?"

I shook my head.

"Humph," said my guardian. "I am mistaken, I dare say." As there was a little pause here, which I thought, for my dear girl's satisfaction, had better be filled up, I hummed an air as I worked which was a favourite with my guardian.

"And do you think Mr. Woodcourt will make another voyage?" I asked him when I had hummed it quietly all through.

"I don't quite know what to think, my dear, but I should say it was likely at present that he will give a long trip to another country."

"I am sure he will take the best wishes of all our hearts with him wherever he goes," said I; "and though they are not riches, he will never be the poorer for them, guardian, at least."

"Never, little woman," he replied.

I was sitting in my usual place, which was now beside my guardian's chair. That had not been my usual place before the letter, but it was now. I looked up to Ada, who was sitting opposite, and I saw, as she looked at me, that her eyes were filled with tears and that tears were falling down her face. I felt that I had only to be placid and merry once for all to undeceive my dear and set her loving heart at rest. I really was so, and I had nothing to do but to be myself.

So I made my sweet girl lean upon my shoulder—how little thinking

what was heavy on her mind!—and I said she was not quite well, and put my arm about her, and took her upstairs. When we were in our own room, and when she might perhaps have told me what I was so unprepared to hear, I gave her no encouragement to confide in me; I never thought she stood in need of it.

"Oh, my dear good Esther," said Ada, "if I could only make up my mind to speak to you and my cousin John when you are together!"

"Why, my love!" I remonstrated. "Ada, why should you not speak to us!"

Ada only dropped her head and pressed me closer to her heart.

"You surely don't forget, my beauty," said I, smiling, "what quiet, old-fashioned people we are and how I have settled down to be the discreetest of dames? You don't forget how happily and peacefully my life is all marked out for me, and by whom? I am certain that you don't forget by what a noble character, Ada. That can never be."

"No, never, Esther."

"Why then, my dear," said I, "there can be nothing amiss—and why should you not speak to us?"

"Nothing amiss, Esther?" returned Ada. "Oh, when I think of all these years, and of his fatherly care and kindness, and of the old relations among us, and of you, what shall I do, what shall I do!"

I looked at my child in some wonder, but I thought it better not to answer otherwise than by cheering her, and so I turned off into many little recollections of our life together and prevented her from saying more. When she lay down to sleep, and not before, I returned to my guardian to say good night, and then I came back to Ada and sat near her for a little while.

She was asleep, and I thought as I looked at her that she was a little changed. I had thought so more than once lately. I could not decide, even looking at her while she was unconscious, how she was changed, but something in the familiar beauty of her face looked different to me. My guardian's old hopes of her and Richard arose sorrowfully in my mind, and I said to myself, "She has been anxious about him," and I wondered how that love would end.

When I had come home from Caddy's while she was ill, I had often found Ada at work, and she had always put her work away, and I had never

known what it was. Some of it now lay in a drawer near her, which was not quite closed. I did not open the drawer, but I still rather wondered what the work could be, for it was evidently nothing for herself.

And I noticed as I kissed my dear that she lay with one hand under her pillow so that it was hidden.

How much less amiable I must have been than they thought me, how much less amiable than I thought myself, to be so preoccupied with my own cheerfulness and contentment as to think that it only rested with me to put my dear girl right and set her mind at peace!

But I lay down, self-deceived, in that belief. And I awoke in it next day to find that there was still the same shade between me and my darling.

CHAPTER LI

Enlightened

WHEN MR. WOODCOURT ARRIVED in London, he went, that very same day, to Mr. Vholes's in Symond's Inn. For he never once, from the moment when I entreated him to be a friend to Richard, neglected or forgot his promise. He had told me that he accepted the charge as a sacred trust, and he was ever true to it in that spirit.

He found Mr. Vholes in his office and informed Mr. Vholes of his agreement with Richard that he should call there to learn his address.

"Just so, sir," said Mr. Vholes. "Mr. C.'s address is not a hundred miles from here, sir, Mr. C.'s address is not a hundred miles from here. Would you take a seat, sir?"

Mr. Woodcourt thanked Mr. Vholes, but he had no business with him beyond what he had mentioned.

"Just so, sir. I believe, sir," said Mr. Vholes, still quietly insisting on the seat by not giving the address, "that you have influence with Mr. C. Indeed I am aware that you have."

"I was not aware of it myself," returned Mr. Woodcourt; "but I suppose you know best."

"Sir," rejoined Mr. Vholes, self-contained as usual, voice and all, "it is a part of my professional duty to know best. It is a part of my professional duty to study and to understand a gentleman who confides his interests to me. In my professional duty I shall not be wanting, sir, if I know it. I may, with the best intentions, be wanting in it without knowing it; but not if I know it, sir."

Mr. Woodcourt again mentioned the address.

"Give me leave, sir," said Mr. Vholes. "Bear with me for a moment. Sir, Mr. C. is playing for a considerable stake, and cannot play without—need I say what?"

"Money, I presume?"

"Sir," said Mr. Vholes, "to be honest with you (honesty being my golden

rule, whether I gain by it or lose, and I find that I generally lose), money is the word. Now, sir, upon the chances of Mr. C.'s game I express to you no opinion, NO opinion. It might be highly impolitic in Mr. C., after playing so long and so high, to leave off; it might be the reverse; I say nothing. No, sir," said Mr. Vholes, bringing his hand flat down upon his desk in a positive manner, "nothing."

"You seem to forget," returned Mr. Woodcourt, "that I ask you to say nothing and have no interest in anything you say."

"Pardon me, sir!" retorted Mr. Vholes. "You do yourself an injustice. No, sir! Pardon me! You shall not—shall not in my office, if I know it—do yourself an injustice. You are interested in anything, and in everything, that relates to your friend. I know human nature much better, sir, than to admit for an instant that a gentleman of your appearance is not interested in whatever concerns his friend."

"Well," replied Mr. Woodcourt, "that may be. I am particularly interested in his address."

"The number, sir," said Mr. Vholes parenthetically, "I believe I have already mentioned. If Mr. C. is to continue to play for this considerable stake, sir, he must have funds. Understand me! There are funds in hand at present. I ask for nothing; there are funds in hand. But for the onward play, more funds must be provided, unless Mr. C. is to throw away what he has already ventured, which is wholly and solely a point for his consideration. This, sir, I take the opportunity of stating openly to you as the friend of Mr. C. Without funds I shall always be happy to appear and act for Mr. C. to the extent of all such costs as are safe to be allowed out of the estate, not beyond that. I could not go beyond that, sir, without wronging some one. I must either wrong my three dear girls or my venerable father, who is entirely dependent on me, in the Vale of Taunton; or some one. Whereas, sir, my resolution is (call it weakness or folly if you please) to wrong no one."

Mr. Woodcourt rather sternly rejoined that he was glad to hear it.

"I wish, sir," said Mr. Vholes, "to leave a good name behind me. Therefore I take every opportunity of openly stating to a friend of Mr. C. how Mr. C. is situated. As to myself, sir, the labourer is worthy of his hire. If I undertake to put my shoulder to the wheel, I do it, and I earn what I get. I am here for that purpose. My name is painted on the door outside, with

that object."

"And Mr. Carstone's address, Mr. Vholes?"

"Sir," returned Mr. Vholes, "as I believe I have already mentioned, it is next door. On the second story you will find Mr. C.'s apartments. Mr. C. desires to be near his professional adviser, and I am far from objecting, for I court inquiry."

Upon this Mr. Woodcourt wished Mr. Vholes good day and went in search of Richard, the change in whose appearance he began to understand now but too well.

He found him in a dull room, fadedly furnished, much as I had found him in his barrack-room but a little while before, except that he was not writing but was sitting with a book before him, from which his eyes and thoughts were far astray. As the door chanced to be standing open, Mr. Woodcourt was in his presence for some moments without being perceived, and he told me that he never could forget the haggardness of his face and the dejection of his manner before he was aroused from his dream.

"Woodcourt, my dear fellow," cried Richard, starting up with extended hands, "you come upon my vision like a ghost."

"A friendly one," he replied, "and only waiting, as they say ghosts do, to be addressed. How does the mortal world go?" They were seated now, near together.

"Badly enough, and slowly enough," said Richard, "speaking at least for my part of it."

"What part is that?"

"The Chancery part."

"I never heard," returned Mr. Woodcourt, shaking his head, "of its going well yet."

"Nor I," said Richard moodily. "Who ever did?" He brightened again in a moment and said with his natural openness, "Woodcourt, I should be sorry to be misunderstood by you, even if I gained by it in your estimation. You must know that I have done no good this long time. I have not intended to do much harm, but I seem to have been capable of nothing else. It may be that I should have done better by keeping out of the net into which my destiny has worked me, but I think not, though I dare say you will soon hear, if you have not already heard, a very different opinion. To make short of a long story, I am afraid I have wanted an object; but I have an object

now—or it has me—and it is too late to discuss it. Take me as I am, and make the best of me."

"A bargain," said Mr. Woodcourt. "Do as much by me in return."

"Oh! You," returned Richard, "you can pursue your art for its own sake, and can put your hand upon the plough and never turn, and can strike a purpose out of anything. You and I are very different creatures."

He spoke regretfully and lapsed for a moment into his weary condition.

"Well, well!" he cried, shaking it off. "Everything has an end. We shall see! So you will take me as I am, and make the best of me?"

"Aye! Indeed I will." They shook hands upon it laughingly, but in deep earnestness. I can answer for one of them with my heart of hearts.

"You come as a godsend," said Richard, "for I have seen nobody here yet but Vholes. Woodcourt, there is one subject I should like to mention, for once and for all, in the beginning of our treaty. You can hardly make the best of me if I don't. You know, I dare say, that I have an attachment to my cousin Ada?"

Mr. Woodcourt replied that I had hinted as much to him. "Now pray," returned Richard, "don't think me a heap of selfishness. Don't suppose that I am splitting my head and half breaking my heart over this miserable Chancery suit for my own rights and interests alone. Ada's are bound up with mine; they can't be separated; Vholes works for both of us. Do think of that!"

He was so very solicitous on this head that Mr. Woodcourt gave him the strongest assurances that he did him no injustice.

"You see," said Richard, with something pathetic in his manner of lingering on the point, though it was off-hand and unstudied, "to an upright fellow like you, bringing a friendly face like yours here, I cannot bear the thought of appearing selfish and mean. I want to see Ada righted, Woodcourt, as well as myself; I want to do my utmost to right her, as well as myself; I venture what I can scrape together to extricate her, as well as myself. Do, I beseech you, think of that!"

Afterwards, when Mr. Woodcourt came to reflect on what had passed, he was so very much impressed by the strength of Richard's anxiety on this point that in telling me generally of his first visit to Symond's Inn he particularly dwelt upon it. It revived a fear I had had before that my dear girl's little property would be absorbed by Mr. Vholes and that Richard's

justification to himself would be sincerely this. It was just as I began to take care of Caddy that the interview took place, and I now return to the time when Caddy had recovered and the shade was still between me and my darling.

I proposed to Ada that morning that we should go and see Richard. It a little surprised me to find that she hesitated and was not so radiantly willing as I had expected.

"My dear," said I, "you have not had any difference with Richard since I have been so much away?"

"No, Esther."

"Not heard of him, perhaps?" said I.

"Yes, I have heard of him," said Ada.

Such tears in her eyes, and such love in her face. I could not make my darling out. Should I go to Richard's by myself? I said. No, Ada thought I had better not go by myself. Would she go with me? Yes, Ada thought she had better go with me. Should we go now? Yes, let us go now. Well, I could not understand my darling, with the tears in her eyes and the love in her face!

We were soon equipped and went out. It was a sombre day, and drops of chill rain fell at intervals. It was one of those colourless days when everything looks heavy and harsh. The houses frowned at us, the dust rose at us, the smoke swooped at us, nothing made any compromise about itself or wore a softened aspect. I fancied my beautiful girl quite out of place in the rugged streets, and I thought there were more funerals passing along the dismal pavements than I had ever seen before.

We had first to find out Symond's Inn. We were going to inquire in a shop when Ada said she thought it was near Chancery Lane. "We are not likely to be far out, my love, if we go in that direction," said I. So to Chancery Lane we went, and there, sure enough, we saw it written up. Symond's Inn.

We had next to find out the number. "Or Mr. Vholes's office will do," I recollected, "for Mr. Vholes's office is next door." Upon which Ada said, perhaps that was Mr. Vholes's office in the corner there. And it really was.

Then came the question, which of the two next doors? I was going for the one, and my darling was going for the other; and my darling was right again. So up we went to the second story, when we came to Richard's name

in great white letters on a hearse-like panel.

I should have knocked, but Ada said perhaps we had better turn the handle and go in. Thus we came to Richard, poring over a table covered with dusty bundles of papers which seemed to me like dusty mirrors reflecting his own mind. Wherever I looked I saw the ominous words that ran in it repeated. Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

He received us very affectionately, and we sat down. “If you had come a little earlier,” he said, “you would have found Woodcourt here. There never was such a good fellow as Woodcourt is. He finds time to look in between-whiles, when anybody else with half his work to do would be thinking about not being able to come. And he is so cheery, so fresh, so sensible, so earnest, so—everything that I am not, that the place brightens whenever he comes, and darkens whenever he goes again.”

“God bless him,” I thought, “for his truth to me!”

“He is not so sanguine, Ada,” continued Richard, casting his dejected look over the bundles of papers, “as Vholes and I are usually, but he is only an outsider and is not in the mysteries. We have gone into them, and he has not. He can’t be expected to know much of such a labyrinth.”

As his look wandered over the papers again and he passed his two hands over his head, I noticed how sunken and how large his eyes appeared, how dry his lips were, and how his finger-nails were all bitten away.

“Is this a healthy place to live in, Richard, do you think?” said I.

“Why, my dear Minerva,” answered Richard with his old gay laugh, “it is neither a rural nor a cheerful place; and when the sun shines here, you may lay a pretty heavy wager that it is shining brightly in an open spot. But it’s well enough for the time. It’s near the offices and near Vholes.”

“Perhaps,” I hinted, “a change from both—”

“Might do me good?” said Richard, forcing a laugh as he finished the sentence. “I shouldn’t wonder! But it can only come in one way now—in one of two ways, I should rather say. Either the suit must be ended, Esther, or the suitor. But it shall be the suit, my dear girl, the suit, my dear girl!”

These latter words were addressed to Ada, who was sitting nearest to him. Her face being turned away from me and towards him, I could not see it.

“We are doing very well,” pursued Richard. “Vholes will tell you so. We are really spinning along. Ask Vholes. We are giving them no rest. Vholes

knows all their windings and turnings, and we are upon them everywhere. We have astonished them already. We shall rouse up that nest of sleepers, mark my words!”

His hopefulness had long been more painful to me than his despondency; it was so unlike hopefulness, had something so fierce in its determination to be it, was so hungry and eager, and yet so conscious of being forced and unsustainable that it had long touched me to the heart. But the commentary upon it now indelibly written in his handsome face made it far more distressing than it used to be. I say indelibly, for I felt persuaded that if the fatal cause could have been for ever terminated, according to his brightest visions, in that same hour, the traces of the premature anxiety, self-reproach, and disappointment it had occasioned him would have remained upon his features to the hour of his death.

“The sight of our dear little woman,” said Richard, Ada still remaining silent and quiet, “is so natural to me, and her compassionate face is so like the face of old days—”

Ah! No, no. I smiled and shook my head.

“—So exactly like the face of old days,” said Richard in his cordial voice, and taking my hand with the brotherly regard which nothing ever changed, “that I can’t make pretences with her. I fluctuate a little; that’s the truth. Sometimes I hope, my dear, and sometimes I—don’t quite despair, but nearly. I get,” said Richard, relinquishing my hand gently and walking across the room, “so tired!”

He took a few turns up and down and sunk upon the sofa. “I get,” he repeated gloomily, “so tired. It is such weary, weary work!”

He was leaning on his arm saying these words in a meditative voice and looking at the ground when my darling rose, put off her bonnet, kneeled down beside him with her golden hair falling like sunlight on his head, clasped her two arms round his neck, and turned her face to me. Oh, what a loving and devoted face I saw!

“Esther, dear,” she said very quietly, “I am not going home again.”

A light shone in upon me all at once.

“Never any more. I am going to stay with my dear husband. We have been married above two months. Go home without me, my own Esther; I shall never go home any more!” With those words my darling drew his head down on her breast and held it there. And if ever in my life I saw a love that

nothing but death could change, I saw it then before me.

"Speak to Esther, my dearest," said Richard, breaking the silence presently. "Tell her how it was."

I met her before she could come to me and folded her in my arms. We neither of us spoke, but with her cheek against my own I wanted to hear nothing. "My pet," said I. "My love. My poor, poor girl!" I pitied her so much. I was very fond of Richard, but the impulse that I had upon me was to pity her so much.

"Esther, will you forgive me? Will my cousin John forgive me?"

"My dear," said I, "to doubt it for a moment is to do him a great wrong. And as to me!" Why, as to me, what had I to forgive!

I dried my sobbing darling's eyes and sat beside her on the sofa, and Richard sat on my other side; and while I was reminded of that so different night when they had first taken me into their confidence and had gone on in their own wild happy way, they told me between them how it was.

"All I had was Richard's," Ada said; "and Richard would not take it, Esther, and what could I do but be his wife when I loved him dearly!"

"And you were so fully and so kindly occupied, excellent Dame Durden," said Richard, "that how could we speak to you at such a time! And besides, it was not a long-considered step. We went out one morning and were married."

"And when it was done, Esther," said my darling, "I was always thinking how to tell you and what to do for the best. And sometimes I thought you ought to know it directly, and sometimes I thought you ought not to know it and keep it from my cousin John; and I could not tell what to do, and I fretted very much."

How selfish I must have been not to have thought of this before! I don't know what I said now. I was so sorry, and yet I was so fond of them and so glad that they were fond of me; I pitied them so much, and yet I felt a kind of pride in their loving one another. I never had experienced such painful and pleasurable emotion at one time, and in my own heart I did not know which predominated. But I was not there to darken their way; I did not do that.

When I was less foolish and more composed, my darling took her wedding-ring from her bosom, and kissed it, and put it on. Then I remembered last night and told Richard that ever since her marriage she had

worn it at night when there was no one to see. Then Ada blushingly asked me how did I know that, my dear. Then I told Ada how I had seen her hand concealed under her pillow and had little thought why, my dear. Then they began telling me how it was all over again, and I began to be sorry and glad again, and foolish again, and to hide my plain old face as much as I could lest I should put them out of heart.

Thus the time went on until it became necessary for me to think of returning. When that time arrived it was the worst of all, for then my darling completely broke down. She clung round my neck, calling me by every dear name she could think of and saying what should she do without me! Nor was Richard much better; and as for me, I should have been the worst of the three if I had not severely said to myself, “Now Esther, if you do, I’ll never speak to you again!”

“Why, I declare,” said I, “I never saw such a wife. I don’t think she loves her husband at all. Here, Richard, take my child, for goodness’ sake.” But I held her tight all the while, and could have wept over her I don’t know how long.

“I give this dear young couple notice,” said I, “that I am only going away to come back to-morrow and that I shall be always coming backwards and forwards until Symond’s Inn is tired of the sight of me. So I shall not say good-bye, Richard. For what would be the use of that, you know, when I am coming back so soon!”

I had given my darling to him now, and I meant to go; but I lingered for one more look of the precious face which it seemed to rive my heart to turn from.

So I said (in a merry, bustling manner) that unless they gave me some encouragement to come back, I was not sure that I could take that liberty, upon which my dear girl looked up, faintly smiling through her tears, and I folded her lovely face between my hands, and gave it one last kiss, and laughed, and ran away.

And when I got downstairs, oh, how I cried! It almost seemed to me that I had lost my Ada for ever. I was so lonely and so blank without her, and it was so desolate to be going home with no hope of seeing her there, that I could get no comfort for a little while as I walked up and down in a dim corner sobbing and crying.

I came to myself by and by, after a little scolding, and took a coach

home. The poor boy whom I had found at St. Albans had reappeared a short time before and was lying at the point of death; indeed, was then dead, though I did not know it. My guardian had gone out to inquire about him and did not return to dinner. Being quite alone, I cried a little again, though on the whole I don't think I behaved so very, very ill.

It was only natural that I should not be quite accustomed to the loss of my darling yet. Three or four hours were not a long time after years. But my mind dwelt so much upon the uncongenial scene in which I had left her, and I pictured it as such an overshadowed stony-hearted one, and I so longed to be near her and taking some sort of care of her, that I determined to go back in the evening only to look up at her windows.

It was foolish, I dare say, but it did not then seem at all so to me, and it does not seem quite so even now. I took Charley into my confidence, and we went out at dusk. It was dark when we came to the new strange home of my dear girl, and there was a light behind the yellow blinds. We walked past cautiously three or four times, looking up, and narrowly missed encountering Mr. Vholes, who came out of his office while we were there and turned his head to look up too before going home. The sight of his lank black figure and the lonesome air of that nook in the dark were favourable to the state of my mind. I thought of the youth and love and beauty of my dear girl, shut up in such an ill-assorted refuge, almost as if it were a cruel place.

It was very solitary and very dull, and I did not doubt that I might safely steal upstairs. I left Charley below and went up with a light foot, not distressed by any glare from the feeble oil lanterns on the way. I listened for a few moments, and in the musty rotting silence of the house believed that I could hear the murmur of their young voices. I put my lips to the hearse-like panel of the door as a kiss for my dear and came quietly down again, thinking that one of these days I would confess to the visit.

And it really did me good, for though nobody but Charley and I knew anything about it, I somehow felt as if it had diminished the separation between Ada and me and had brought us together again for those moments. I went back, not quite accustomed yet to the change, but all the better for that hovering about my darling.

My guardian had come home and was standing thoughtfully by the dark window. When I went in, his face cleared and he came to his seat, but he

caught the light upon my face as I took mine.

"Little woman," said he, "You have been crying."

"Why, yes, guardian," said I, "I am afraid I have been, a little. Ada has been in such distress, and is so very sorry, guardian."

I put my arm on the back of his chair, and I saw in his glance that my words and my look at her empty place had prepared him.

"Is she married, my dear?"

I told him all about it and how her first entreaties had referred to his forgiveness.

"She has no need of it," said he. "Heaven bless her and her husband!" But just as my first impulse had been to pity her, so was his. "Poor girl, poor girl! Poor Rick! Poor Ada!"

Neither of us spoke after that, until he said with a sigh, "Well, well, my dear! Bleak House is thinning fast."

"But its mistress remains, guardian." Though I was timid about saying it, I ventured because of the sorrowful tone in which he had spoken. "She will do all she can to make it happy," said I.

"She will succeed, my love!"

The letter had made no difference between us except that the seat by his side had come to be mine; it made none now. He turned his old bright fatherly look upon me, laid his hand on my hand in his old way, and said again, "She will succeed, my dear. Nevertheless, Bleak House is thinning fast, O little woman!"

I was sorry presently that this was all we said about that. I was rather disappointed. I feared I might not quite have been all I had meant to be since the letter and the answer.

CHAPTER LII

Obstinacy

BUT ONE OTHER DAY had intervened when, early in the morning as we were going to breakfast, Mr. Woodcourt came in haste with the astounding news that a terrible murder had been committed for which Mr. George had been apprehended and was in custody. When he told us that a large reward was offered by Sir Leicester Dedlock for the murderer's apprehension, I did not in my first consternation understand why; but a few more words explained to me that the murdered person was Sir Leicester's lawyer, and immediately my mother's dread of him rushed into my remembrance.

This unforeseen and violent removal of one whom she had long watched and distrusted and who had long watched and distrusted her, one for whom she could have had few intervals of kindness, always dreading in him a dangerous and secret enemy, appeared so awful that my first thoughts were of her. How appalling to hear of such a death and be able to feel no pity! How dreadful to remember, perhaps, that she had sometimes even wished the old man away who was so swiftly hurried out of life!

Such crowding reflections, increasing the distress and fear I always felt when the name was mentioned, made me so agitated that I could scarcely hold my place at the table. I was quite unable to follow the conversation until I had had a little time to recover. But when I came to myself and saw how shocked my guardian was and found that they were earnestly speaking of the suspected man and recalling every favourable impression we had formed of him out of the good we had known of him, my interest and my fears were so strongly aroused in his behalf that I was quite set up again.

"Guardian, you don't think it possible that he is justly accused?"

"My dear, I CAN'T think so. This man whom we have seen so open-hearted and compassionate, who with the might of a giant has the gentleness of a child, who looks as brave a fellow as ever lived and is so simple and quiet with it, this man justly accused of such a crime? I can't believe it. It's not that I don't or I won't. I can't!"

“And I can’t,” said Mr. Woodcourt. “Still, whatever we believe or know of him, we had better not forget that some appearances are against him. He bore an animosity towards the deceased gentleman. He has openly mentioned it in many places. He is said to have expressed himself violently towards him, and he certainly did about him, to my knowledge. He admits that he was alone on the scene of the murder within a few minutes of its commission. I sincerely believe him to be as innocent of any participation in it as I am, but these are all reasons for suspicion falling upon him.”

“True,” said my guardian. And he added, turning to me, “It would be doing him a very bad service, my dear, to shut our eyes to the truth in any of these respects.”

I felt, of course, that we must admit, not only to ourselves but to others, the full force of the circumstances against him. Yet I knew withal (I could not help saying) that their weight would not induce us to desert him in his need.

“Heaven forbid!” returned my guardian. “We will stand by him, as he himself stood by the two poor creatures who are gone.” He meant Mr. Gridley and the boy, to both of whom Mr. George had given shelter.

Mr. Woodcourt then told us that the trooper’s man had been with him before day, after wandering about the streets all night like a distracted creature. That one of the trooper’s first anxieties was that we should not suppose him guilty. That he had charged his messenger to represent his perfect innocence with every solemn assurance he could send us. That Mr. Woodcourt had only quieted the man by undertaking to come to our house very early in the morning with these representations. He added that he was now upon his way to see the prisoner himself.

My guardian said directly he would go too. Now, besides that I liked the retired soldier very much and that he liked me, I had that secret interest in what had happened which was only known to my guardian. I felt as if it came close and near to me. It seemed to become personally important to myself that the truth should be discovered and that no innocent people should be suspected, for suspicion, once run wild, might run wilder.

In a word, I felt as if it were my duty and obligation to go with them. My guardian did not seek to dissuade me, and I went.

It was a large prison with many courts and passages so like one another and so uniformly paved that I seemed to gain a new comprehension, as I

passed along, of the fondness that solitary prisoners, shut up among the same staring walls from year to year, have had—as I have read—for a weed or a stray blade of grass. In an arched room by himself, like a cellar upstairs, with walls so glaringly white that they made the massive iron window-bars and iron-bound door even more profoundly black than they were, we found the trooper standing in a corner. He had been sitting on a bench there and had risen when he heard the locks and bolts turn.

When he saw us, he came forward a step with his usual heavy tread, and there stopped and made a slight bow. But as I still advanced, putting out my hand to him, he understood us in a moment.

"This is a load off my mind, I do assure you, miss and gentlemen," said he, saluting us with great heartiness and drawing a long breath. "And now I don't so much care how it ends."

He scarcely seemed to be the prisoner. What with his coolness and his soldierly bearing, he looked far more like the prison guard.

"This is even a rougher place than my gallery to receive a lady in," said Mr. George, "but I know Miss Summerson will make the best of it." As he handed me to the bench on which he had been sitting, I sat down, which seemed to give him great satisfaction.

"I thank you, miss," said he.

"Now, George," observed my guardian, "as we require no new assurances on your part, so I believe we need give you none on ours."

"Not at all, sir. I thank you with all my heart. If I was not innocent of this crime, I couldn't look at you and keep my secret to myself under the condescension of the present visit. I feel the present visit very much. I am not one of the eloquent sort, but I feel it, Miss Summerson and gentlemen, deeply."

He laid his hand for a moment on his broad chest and bent his head to us. Although he squared himself again directly, he expressed a great amount of natural emotion by these simple means.

"First," said my guardian, "can we do anything for your personal comfort, George?"

"For which, sir?" he inquired, clearing his throat.

"For your personal comfort. Is there anything you want that would lessen the hardship of this confinement?"

"Well, sir," replied George, after a little cogitation, "I am equally obliged

to you, but tobacco being against the rules, I can't say that there is."

"You will think of many little things perhaps, by and by. Whenever you do, George, let us know."

"Thank you, sir. Howsoever," observed Mr. George with one of his sunburnt smiles, "a man who has been knocking about the world in a vagabond kind of a way as long as I have gets on well enough in a place like the present, so far as that goes."

"Next, as to your case," observed my guardian.

"Exactly so, sir," returned Mr. George, folding his arms upon his breast with perfect self-possession and a little curiosity.

"How does it stand now?"

"Why, sir, it is under remand at present. Bucket gives me to understand that he will probably apply for a series of remands from time to time until the case is more complete. How it is to be made more complete I don't myself see, but I dare say Bucket will manage it somehow."

"Why, heaven save us, man," exclaimed my guardian, surprised into his old oddity and vehemence, "you talk of yourself as if you were somebody else!"

"No offence, sir," said Mr. George. "I am very sensible of your kindness. But I don't see how an innocent man is to make up his mind to this kind of thing without knocking his head against the walls unless he takes it in that point of view.

"That is true enough to a certain extent," returned my guardian, softened. "But my good fellow, even an innocent man must take ordinary precautions to defend himself."

"Certainly, sir. And I have done so. I have stated to the magistrates, 'Gentlemen, I am as innocent of this charge as yourselves; what has been stated against me in the way of facts is perfectly true; I know no more about it.' I intend to continue stating that, sir. What more can I do? It's the truth."

"But the mere truth won't do," rejoined my guardian.

"Won't it indeed, sir? Rather a bad look-out for me!" Mr. George good-humouredly observed.

"You must have a lawyer," pursued my guardian. "We must engage a good one for you."

"I ask your pardon, sir," said Mr. George with a step backward. "I am equally obliged. But I must decidedly beg to be excused from anything of

that sort.”

“You won’t have a lawyer?”

“No, sir.” Mr. George shook his head in the most emphatic manner. “I thank you all the same, sir, but—no lawyer!”

“Why not?”

“I don’t take kindly to the breed,” said Mr. George. “Gridley didn’t. And—if you’ll excuse my saying so much—I should hardly have thought you did yourself, sir.”

“That’s equity,” my guardian explained, a little at a loss; “that’s equity, George.”

“Is it, indeed, sir?” returned the trooper in his off-hand manner. “I am not acquainted with those shades of names myself, but in a general way I object to the breed.”

Unfolding his arms and changing his position, he stood with one massive hand upon the table and the other on his hip, as complete a picture of a man who was not to be moved from a fixed purpose as ever I saw. It was in vain that we all three talked to him and endeavoured to persuade him; he listened with that gentleness which went so well with his bluff bearing, but was evidently no more shaken by our representations that his place of confinement was.

“Pray think, once more, Mr. George,” said I. “Have you no wish in reference to your case?”

“I certainly could wish it to be tried, miss,” he returned, “by court-martial; but that is out of the question, as I am well aware. If you will be so good as to favour me with your attention for a couple of minutes, miss, not more, I’ll endeavour to explain myself as clearly as I can.”

He looked at us all three in turn, shook his head a little as if he were adjusting it in the stock and collar of a tight uniform, and after a moment’s reflection went on.

“You see, miss, I have been handcuffed and taken into custody and brought here. I am a marked and disgraced man, and here I am. My shooting gallery is rummaged, high and low, by Bucket; such property as I have—’tis small—is turned this way and that till it don’t know itself; and (as aforesaid) here I am! I don’t particular complain of that. Though I am in these present quarters through no immediately preceding fault of mine, I can very well understand that if I hadn’t gone into the vagabond way in my

youth, this wouldn't have happened. It HAS happened. Then comes the question how to meet it."

He rubbed his swarthy forehead for a moment with a good-humoured look and said apologetically, "I am such a short-winded talker that I must think a bit." Having thought a bit, he looked up again and resumed.

"How to meet it. Now, the unfortunate deceased was himself a lawyer and had a pretty tight hold of me. I don't wish to rake up his ashes, but he had, what I should call if he was living, a devil of a tight hold of me. I don't like his trade the better for that. If I had kept clear of his trade, I should have kept outside this place. But that's not what I mean. Now, suppose I had killed him. Suppose I really had discharged into his body any one of those pistols recently fired off that Bucket has found at my place, and dear me, might have found there any day since it has been my place. What should I have done as soon as I was hard and fast here? Got a lawyer."

He stopped on hearing some one at the locks and bolts and did not resume until the door had been opened and was shut again. For what purpose opened, I will mention presently.

"I should have got a lawyer, and he would have said (as I have often read in the newspapers), 'My client says nothing, my client reserves his defence': my client this, that, and t'other. Well, 'tis not the custom of that breed to go straight, according to my opinion, or to think that other men do. Say I am innocent and I get a lawyer. He would be as likely to believe me guilty as not; perhaps more. What would he do, whether or not? Act as if I was—shut my mouth up, tell me not to commit myself, keep circumstances back, chop the evidence small, quibble, and get me off perhaps! But, Miss Summerson, do I care for getting off in that way; or would I rather be hanged in my own way—if you'll excuse my mentioning anything so disagreeable to a lady?"

He had warmed into his subject now, and was under no further necessity to wait a bit.

"I would rather be hanged in my own way. And I mean to be! I don't intend to say," looking round upon us with his powerful arms akimbo and his dark eyebrows raised, "that I am more partial to being hanged than another man. What I say is, I must come off clear and full or not at all. Therefore, when I hear stated against me what is true, I say it's true; and when they tell me, 'whatever you say will be used,' I tell them I don't mind

that; I mean it to be used. If they can't make me innocent out of the whole truth, they are not likely to do it out of anything less, or anything else. And if they are, it's worth nothing to me."

Taking a pace or two over the stone floor, he came back to the table and finished what he had to say.

"I thank you, miss and gentlemen both, many times for your attention, and many times more for your interest. That's the plain state of the matter as it points itself out to a mere trooper with a blunt broadsword kind of a mind. I have never done well in life beyond my duty as a soldier, and if the worst comes after all, I shall reap pretty much as I have sown. When I got over the first crash of being seized as a murderer—it don't take a rover who has knocked about so much as myself so very long to recover from a crash—I worked my way round to what you find me now. As such I shall remain. No relations will be disgraced by me or made unhappy for me, and—and that's all I've got to say."

The door had been opened to admit another soldier-looking man of less prepossessing appearance at first sight and a weather-tanned, bright-eyed wholesome woman with a basket, who, from her entrance, had been exceedingly attentive to all Mr. George had said. Mr. George had received them with a familiar nod and a friendly look, but without any more particular greeting in the midst of his address. He now shook them cordially by the hand and said, "Miss Summerson and gentlemen, this is an old comrade of mine, Matthew Bagnet. And this is his wife, Mrs. Bagnet."

Mr. Bagnet made us a stiff military bow, and Mrs. Bagnet dropped us a curtsy.

"Real good friends of mine, they are," sald Mr. George. "It was at their house I was taken."

"With a second-hand wiolinceller," Mr. Bagnet put in, twitching his head angrily. "Of a good tone. For a friend. That money was no object to."

"Mat," said Mr. George, "you have heard pretty well all I have been saying to this lady and these two gentlemen. I know it meets your approval?"

Mr. Bagnet, after considering, referred the point to his wife. "Old girl," said he. "Tell him. Whether or not. It meets my approval."

"Why, George," exclaimed Mrs. Bagnet, who had been unpacking her basket, in which there was a piece of cold pickled pork, a little tea and

sugar, and a brown loaf, “you ought to know it don’t. You ought to know it’s enough to drive a person wild to hear you. You won’t be got off this way, and you won’t be got off that way—what do you mean by such picking and choosing? It’s stuff and nonsense, George.”

“Don’t be severe upon me in my misfortunes, Mrs. Bagnet,” said the trooper lightly.

“Oh! Bother your misfortunes,” cried Mrs. Bagnet, “if they don’t make you more reasonable than that comes to. I never was so ashamed in my life to hear a man talk folly as I have been to hear you talk this day to the present company. Lawyers? Why, what but too many cooks should hinder you from having a dozen lawyers if the gentleman recommended them to you.”

“This is a very sensible woman,” said my guardian. “I hope you will persuade him, Mrs. Bagnet.”

“Persuade him, sir?” she returned. “Lord bless you, no. You don’t know George. Now, there!” Mrs. Bagnet left her basket to point him out with both her bare brown hands. “There he stands! As self-willed and as determined a man, in the wrong way, as ever put a human creature under heaven out of patience! You could as soon take up and shoulder an eight and forty pounder by your own strength as turn that man when he has got a thing into his head and fixed it there. Why, don’t I know him!” cried Mrs. Bagnet. “Don’t I know you, George! You don’t mean to set up for a new character with ME after all these years, I hope?”

Her friendly indignation had an exemplary effect upon her husband, who shook his head at the trooper several times as a silent recommendation to him to yield. Between whiles, Mrs. Bagnet looked at me; and I understood from the play of her eyes that she wished me to do something, though I did not comprehend what.

“But I have given up talking to you, old fellow, years and years,” said Mrs. Bagnet as she blew a little dust off the pickled pork, looking at me again; “and when ladies and gentlemen know you as well as I do, they’ll give up talking to you too. If you are not too headstrong to accept of a bit of dinner, here it is.”

“I accept it with many thanks,” returned the trooper.

“Do you though, indeed?” said Mrs. Bagnet, continuing to grumble on good-humouredly. “I’m sure I’m surprised at that. I wonder you don’t

starve in your own way also. It would only be like you. Perhaps you'll set your mind upon THAT next." Here she again looked at me, and I now perceived from her glances at the door and at me, by turns, that she wished us to retire and to await her following us outside the prison. Communicating this by similar means to my guardian and Mr. Woodcourt, I rose.

"We hope you will think better of it, Mr. George," said I, "and we shall come to see you again, trusting to find you more reasonable."

"More grateful, Miss Summerson, you can't find me," he returned.

"But more persuadable we can, I hope," said I. "And let me entreat you to consider that the clearing up of this mystery and the discovery of the real perpetrator of this deed may be of the last importance to others besides yourself."

He heard me respectfully but without much heeding these words, which I spoke a little turned from him, already on my way to the door; he was observing (this they afterwards told me) my height and figure, which seemed to catch his attention all at once.

"'Tis curious," said he. "And yet I thought so at the time!"

My guardian asked him what he meant.

"Why, sir," he answered, "when my ill fortune took me to the dead man's staircase on the night of his murder, I saw a shape so like Miss Summerson's go by me in the dark that I had half a mind to speak to it."

For an instant I felt such a shudder as I never felt before or since and hope I shall never feel again.

"It came downstairs as I went up," said the trooper, "and crossed the moonlighted window with a loose black mantle on; I noticed a deep fringe to it. However, it has nothing to do with the present subject, excepting that Miss Summerson looked so like it at the moment that it came into my head."

I cannot separate and define the feelings that arose in me after this; it is enough that the vague duty and obligation I had felt upon me from the first of following the investigation was, without my distinctly daring to ask myself any question, increased, and that I was indignantly sure of there being no possibility of a reason for my being afraid.

We three went out of the prison and walked up and down at some short distance from the gate, which was in a retired place. We had not waited long when Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet came out too and quickly joined us.

There was a tear in each of Mrs. Bagnet's eyes, and her face was flushed and hurried. "I didn't let George see what I thought about it, you know, miss," was her first remark when she came up, "but he's in a bad way, poor old fellow!"

"Not with care and prudence and good help," said my guardian.

"A gentleman like you ought to know best, sir," returned Mrs. Bagnet, hurriedly drying her eyes on the hem of her grey cloak, "but I am uneasy for him. He has been so careless and said so much that he never meant. The gentlemen of the juries might not understand him as Lignum and me do. And then such a number of circumstances have happened bad for him, and such a number of people will be brought forward to speak against him, and Bucket is so deep."

"With a second-hand wiolinceller. And said he played the fife. When a boy," Mr. Bagnet added with great solemnity.

"Now, I tell you, miss," said Mrs. Bagnet; "and when I say miss, I mean all! Just come into the corner of the wall and I'll tell you!"

Mrs. Bagnet hurried us into a more secluded place and was at first too breathless to proceed, occasioning Mr. Bagnet to say, "Old girl! Tell 'em!"

"Why, then, miss," the old girl proceeded, untying the strings of her bonnet for more air, "you could as soon move Dover Castle as move George on this point unless you had got a new power to move him with. And I have got it!"

"You are a jewel of a woman," said my guardian. "Go on!"

"Now, I tell you, miss," she proceeded, clapping her hands in her hurry and agitation a dozen times in every sentence, "that what he says concerning no relations is all bosh. They don't know of him, but he does know of them. He has said more to me at odd times than to anybody else, and it warn't for nothing that he once spoke to my Woolwich about whitening and wrinkling mothers' heads. For fifty pounds he had seen his mother that day. She's alive and must be brought here straight!"

Instantly Mrs. Bagnet put some pins into her mouth and began pinning up her skirts all round a little higher than the level of her grey cloak, which she accomplished with surpassing dispatch and dexterity.

"Lignum," said Mrs. Bagnet, "you take care of the children, old man, and give me the umbrella! I'm away to Lincolnshire to bring that old lady here."

“But, bless the woman,” cried my guardian with his hand in his pocket, “how is she going? What money has she got?”

Mrs. Bagnet made another application to her skirts and brought forth a leathern purse in which she hastily counted over a few shillings and which she then shut up with perfect satisfaction.

“Never you mind for me, miss. I’m a soldier’s wife and accustomed to travel my own way. Lignum, old boy,” kissing him, “one for yourself, three for the children. Now I’m away into Lincolnshire after George’s mother!”

And she actually set off while we three stood looking at one another lost in amazement. She actually trudged away in her grey cloak at a sturdy pace, and turned the corner, and was gone.

“Mr. Bagnet,” said my guardian. “Do you mean to let her go in that way?”

“Can’t help it,” he returned. “Made her way home once from another quarter of the world. With the same grey cloak. And same umbrella. Whatever the old girl says, do. Do it! Whenever the old girl says, I’LL do it. She does it.”

“Then she is as honest and genuine as she looks,” rejoined my guardian, “and it is impossible to say more for her.”

“She’s Colour-Sergeant of the Nonpareil battalion,” said Mr. Bagnet, looking at us over his shoulder as he went his way also. “And there’s not such another. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained.”

CHAPTER LIII

The Track

MR. BUCKET AND HIS fat forefinger are much in consultation together under existing circumstances. When Mr. Bucket has a matter of this pressing interest under his consideration, the fat forefinger seems to rise, to the dignity of a familiar demon. He puts it to his ears, and it whispers information; he puts it to his lips, and it enjoins him to secrecy; he rubs it over his nose, and it sharpens his scent; he shakes it before a guilty man, and it charms him to his destruction. The Augurs of the Detective Temple invariably predict that when Mr. Bucket and that finger are in much conference, a terrible avenger will be heard of before long.

Otherwise mildly studious in his observation of human nature, on the whole a benignant philosopher not disposed to be severe upon the follies of mankind, Mr. Bucket pervades a vast number of houses and strolls about an infinity of streets, to outward appearance rather languishing for want of an object. He is in the friendliest condition towards his species and will drink with most of them. He is free with his money, affable in his manners, innocent in his conversation—but through the placid stream of his life there glides an under-current of forefinger.

Time and place cannot bind Mr. Bucket. Like man in the abstract, he is here to-day and gone to-morrow—but, very unlike man indeed, he is here again the next day. This evening he will be casually looking into the iron extinguishers at the door of Sir Leicester Dedlock's house in town; and to-morrow morning he will be walking on the leads at Chesney Wold, where erst the old man walked whose ghost is propitiated with a hundred guineas. Drawers, desks, pockets, all things belonging to him, Mr. Bucket examines. A few hours afterwards, he and the Roman will be alone together comparing forefingers.

It is likely that these occupations are irreconcilable with home enjoyment, but it is certain that Mr. Bucket at present does not go home. Though in general he highly appreciates the society of Mrs. Bucket—a lady

of a natural detective genius, which if it had been improved by professional exercise, might have done great things, but which has paused at the level of a clever amateur—he holds himself aloof from that dear solace. Mrs. Bucket is dependent on their lodger (fortunately an amiable lady in whom she takes an interest) for companionship and conversation.

A great crowd assembles in Lincoln's Inn Fields on the day of the funeral. Sir Leicester Dedlock attends the ceremony in person; strictly speaking, there are only three other human followers, that is to say, Lord Doodle, William Buffy, and the debilitated cousin (thrown in as a make-weight), but the amount of inconsolable carriages is immense. The peerage contributes more four-wheeled affliction than has ever been seen in that neighbourhood. Such is the assemblage of armorial bearings on coach panels that the Herald's College might be supposed to have lost its father and mother at a blow. The Duke of Foodle sends a splendid pile of dust and ashes, with silver wheel-boxes, patent axles, all the last improvements, and three bereaved worms, six feet high, holding on behind, in a bunch of woe. All the state coachmen in London seem plunged into mourning; and if that dead old man of the rusty garb be not beyond a taste in horseflesh (which appears impossible), it must be highly gratified this day.

Quiet among the undertakers and the equipages and the calves of so many legs all steeped in grief, Mr. Bucket sits concealed in one of the inconsolable carriages and at his ease surveys the crowd through the lattice blinds. He has a keen eye for a crowd—as for what not?—and looking here and there, now from this side of the carriage, now from the other, now up at the house windows, now along the people's heads, nothing escapes him.

"And there you are, my partner, eh?" says Mr. Bucket to himself, apostrophizing Mrs. Bucket, stationed, by his favour, on the steps of the deceased's house. "And so you are. And so you are! And very well indeed you are looking, Mrs. Bucket!"

The procession has not started yet, but is waiting for the cause of its assemblage to be brought out. Mr. Bucket, in the foremost emblazoned carriage, uses his two fat forefingers to hold the lattice a hair's breadth open while he looks.

And it says a great deal for his attachment, as a husband, that he is still occupied with Mrs. B. "There you are, my partner, eh?" he murmuringly repeats. "And our lodger with you. I'm taking notice of you, Mrs. Bucket; I

hope you're all right in your health, my dear!"

Not another word does Mr. Bucket say, but sits with most attentive eyes until the sacked depository of noble secrets is brought down—Where are all those secrets now? Does he keep them yet? Did they fly with him on that sudden journey?—and until the procession moves, and Mr. Bucket's view is changed. After which he composes himself for an easy ride and takes note of the fittings of the carriage in case he should ever find such knowledge useful.

Contrast enough between Mr. Tulkinghorn shut up in his dark carriage and Mr. Bucket shut up in HIS. Between the immeasurable track of space beyond the little wound that has thrown the one into the fixed sleep which jolts so heavily over the stones of the streets, and the narrow track of blood which keeps the other in the watchful state expressed in every hair of his head! But it is all one to both; neither is troubled about that.

Mr. Bucket sits out the procession in his own easy manner and glides from the carriage when the opportunity he has settled with himself arrives. He makes for Sir Leicester Dedlock's, which is at present a sort of home to him, where he comes and goes as he likes at all hours, where he is always welcome and made much of, where he knows the whole establishment, and walks in an atmosphere of mysterious greatness.

No knocking or ringing for Mr. Bucket. He has caused himself to be provided with a key and can pass in at his pleasure. As he is crossing the hall, Mercury informs him, "Here's another letter for you, Mr. Bucket, come by post," and gives it him.

"Another one, eh?" says Mr. Bucket.

If Mercury should chance to be possessed by any lingering curiosity as to Mr. Bucket's letters, that wary person is not the man to gratify it. Mr. Bucket looks at him as if his face were a vista of some miles in length and he were leisurely contemplating the same.

"Do you happen to carry a box?" says Mr. Bucket.

Unfortunately Mercury is no snuff-taker.

"Could you fetch me a pinch from anywheres?" says Mr. Bucket. "Thankee. It don't matter what it is; I'm not particular as to the kind. Thankee!"

Having leisurely helped himself from a canister borrowed from somebody downstairs for the purpose, and having made a considerable

show of tasting it, first with one side of his nose and then with the other, Mr. Bucket, with much deliberation, pronounces it of the right sort and goes on, letter in hand.

Now although Mr. Bucket walks upstairs to the little library within the larger one with the face of a man who receives some scores of letters every day, it happens that much correspondence is not incidental to his life. He is no great scribe, rather handling his pen like the pocket-staff he carries about with him always convenient to his grasp, and discourages correspondence with himself in others as being too artless and direct a way of doing delicate business. Further, he often sees damaging letters produced in evidence and has occasion to reflect that it was a green thing to write them. For these reasons he has very little to do with letters, either as sender or receiver. And yet he has received a round half-dozen within the last twenty-four hours.

"And this," says Mr. Bucket, spreading it out on the table, "is in the same hand, and consists of the same two words."

What two words?

He turns the key in the door, ungirdles his black pocket-book (book of fate to many), lays another letter by it, and reads, boldly written in each, "Lady Dedlock."

"Yes, yes," says Mr. Bucket. "But I could have made the money without this anonymous information."

Having put the letters in his book of fate and girdled it up again, he unlocks the door just in time to admit his dinner, which is brought upon a goodly tray with a decanter of sherry. Mr. Bucket frequently observes, in friendly circles where there is no restraint, that he likes a toothful of your fine old brown East Inder sherry better than anything you can offer him. Consequently he fills and empties his glass with a smack of his lips and is proceeding with his refreshment when an idea enters his mind.

Mr. Bucket softly opens the door of communication between that room and the next and looks in. The library is deserted, and the fire is sinking low. Mr. Bucket's eye, after taking a pigeon-flight round the room, alights upon a table where letters are usually put as they arrive. Several letters for Sir Leicester are upon it. Mr. Bucket draws near and examines the directions. "No," he says, "there's none in that hand. It's only me as is written to. I can break it to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to-morrow."

With that he returns to finish his dinner with a good appetite, and after a

light nap, is summoned into the drawing-room. Sir Leicester has received him there these several evenings past to know whether he has anything to report. The debilitated cousin (much exhausted by the funeral) and Volumnia are in attendance.

Mr. Bucket makes three distinctly different bows to these three people. A bow of homage to Sir Leicester, a bow of gallantry to Volumnia, and a bow of recognition to the debilitated Cousin, to whom it airily says, “You are a swell about town, and you know me, and I know you.” Having distributed these little specimens of his tact, Mr. Bucket rubs his hands.

“Have you anything new to communicate, officer?” inquires Sir Leicester. “Do you wish to hold any conversation with me in private?”

“Why—not to-night, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet.”

“Because my time,” pursues Sir Leicester, “is wholly at your disposal with a view to the vindication of the outraged majesty of the law.”

Mr. Bucket coughs and glances at Volumnia, rouged and necklaced, as though he would respectfully observe, “I do assure you, you’re a pretty creetur. I’ve seen hundreds worse looking at your time of life, I have indeed.”

The fair Volumnia, not quite unconscious perhaps of the humanizing influence of her charms, pauses in the writing of cocked-hat notes and meditatively adjusts the pearl necklace. Mr. Bucket prices that decoration in his mind and thinks it as likely as not that Volumnia is writing poetry.

“If I have not,” pursues Sir Leicester, “in the most emphatic manner, adjured you, officer, to exercise your utmost skill in this atrocious case, I particularly desire to take the present opportunity of rectifying any omission I may have made. Let no expense be a consideration. I am prepared to defray all charges. You can incur none in pursuit of the object you have undertaken that I shall hesitate for a moment to bear.”

Mr. Bucket made Sir Leicester’s bow again as a response to this liberality.

“My mind,” Sir Leicester adds with a generous warmth, “has not, as may be easily supposed, recovered its tone since the late diabolical occurrence. It is not likely ever to recover its tone. But it is full of indignation to-night after undergoing the ordeal of consigning to the tomb the remains of a faithful, a zealous, a devoted adherent.”

Sir Leicester’s voice trembles and his grey hair stirs upon his head. Tears

are in his eyes; the best part of his nature is aroused.

“I declare,” he says, “I solemnly declare that until this crime is discovered and, in the course of justice, punished, I almost feel as if there were a stain upon my name. A gentleman who has devoted a large portion of his life to me, a gentleman who has devoted the last day of his life to me, a gentleman who has constantly sat at my table and slept under my roof, goes from my house to his own, and is struck down within an hour of his leaving my house. I cannot say but that he may have been followed from my house, watched at my house, even first marked because of his association with my house—which may have suggested his possessing greater wealth and being altogether of greater importance than his own retiring demeanour would have indicated. If I cannot with my means and influence and my position bring all the perpetrators of such a crime to light, I fail in the assertion of my respect for that gentleman’s memory and of my fidelity towards one who was ever faithful to me.”

While he makes this protestation with great emotion and earnestness, looking round the room as if he were addressing an assembly, Mr. Bucket glances at him with an observant gravity in which there might be, but for the audacity of the thought, a touch of compassion.

“The ceremony of to-day,” continues Sir Leicester, “strikingly illustrative of the respect in which my deceased friend”—he lays a stress upon the word, for death levels all distinctions—“was held by the flower of the land, has, I say, aggravated the shock I have received from this most horrible and audacious crime. If it were my brother who had committed it, I would not spare him.”

Mr. Bucket looks very grave. Volumnia remarks of the deceased that he was the trustiest and dearest person!

“You must feel it as a deprivation to you, miss,” replies Mr. Bucket soothingly, “no doubt. He was calculated to BE a deprivation, I’m sure he was.”

Volumnia gives Mr. Bucket to understand, in reply, that her sensitive mind is fully made up never to get the better of it as long as she lives, that her nerves are unstrung for ever, and that she has not the least expectation of ever smiling again. Meanwhile she folds up a cocked hat for that redoubtable old general at Bath, descriptive of her melancholy condition.

“It gives a start to a delicate female,” says Mr. Bucket sympathetically,

“but it’ll wear off.”

Volumnia wishes of all things to know what is doing? Whether they are going to convict, or whatever it is, that dreadful soldier? Whether he had any accomplices, or whatever the thing is called in the law? And a great deal more to the like artless purpose.

“Why you see, miss,” returns Mr. Bucket, bringing the finger into persuasive action—and such is his natural gallantry that he had almost said “my dear”—“it ain’t easy to answer those questions at the present moment. Not at the present moment. I’ve kept myself on this case, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,” whom Mr. Bucket takes into the conversation in right of his importance, “morning, noon, and night. But for a glass or two of sherry, I don’t think I could have had my mind so much upon the stretch as it has been. I COULD answer your questions, miss, but duty forbids it. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, will very soon be made acquainted with all that has been traced. And I hope that he may find it”—Mr. Bucket again looks grave—“to his satisfaction.”

The debilitated cousin only hopes some fler’ll be executed—zample. Thinks more interest’s wanted—get man hanged presentime—than get man place ten thousand a year. Hasn’t a doubt—zample—far better hang wrong fler than no fler.

“YOU know life, you know, sir,” says Mr. Bucket with a complimentary twinkle of his eye and crook of his finger, “and you can confirm what I’ve mentioned to this lady. YOU don’t want to be told that from information I have received I have gone to work. You’re up to what a lady can’t be expected to be up to. Lord! Especially in your elevated station of society, miss,” says Mr. Bucket, quite reddening at another narrow escape from “my dear.”

“The officer, Volumnia,” observes Sir Leicester, “is faithful to his duty, and perfectly right.”

Mr. Bucket murmurs, “Glad to have the honour of your approbation, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet.”

“In fact, Volumnia,” proceeds Sir Leicester, “it is not holding up a good model for imitation to ask the officer any such questions as you have put to him. He is the best judge of his own responsibility; he acts upon his responsibility. And it does not become us, who assist in making the laws, to impede or interfere with those who carry them into execution. Or,” says Sir

Leicester somewhat sternly, for Volumnia was going to cut in before he had rounded his sentence, “or who vindicate their outraged majesty.”

Volumnia with all humility explains that she had not merely the plea of curiosity to urge (in common with the giddy youth of her sex in general) but that she is perfectly dying with regret and interest for the darling man whose loss they all deplore.

“Very well, Volumnia,” returns Sir Leicester. “Then you cannot be too discreet.”

Mr. Bucket takes the opportunity of a pause to be heard again.

“Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I have no objections to telling this lady, with your leave and among ourselves, that I look upon the case as pretty well complete. It is a beautiful case—a beautiful case—and what little is wanting to complete it, I expect to be able to supply in a few hours.”

“I am very glad indeed to hear it,” says Sir Leicester. “Highly creditable to you.”

“Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,” returns Mr. Bucket very seriously, “I hope it may at one and the same time do me credit and prove satisfactory to all. When I depict it as a beautiful case, you see, miss,” Mr. Bucket goes on, glancing gravely at Sir Leicester, “I mean from my point of view. As considered from other points of view, such cases will always involve more or less unpleasantness. Very strange things comes to our knowledge in families, miss; bless your heart, what you would think to be phenomenons, quite.”

Volumnia, with her innocent little scream, supposes so.

“Aye, and even in gen-teel families, in high families, in great families,” says Mr. Bucket, again gravely eyeing Sir Leicester aside. “I have had the honour of being employed in high families before, and you have no idea—come, I’ll go so far as to say not even YOU have any idea, sir,” this to the debilitated cousin, “what games goes on!”

The cousin, who has been casting sofa-pillows on his head, in a prostration of boredom yawns, “Vayli,” being the used-up for “very likely.”

Sir Leicester, deeming it time to dismiss the officer, here majestically interposes with the words, “Very good. Thank you!” and also with a wave of his hand, implying not only that there is an end of the discourse, but that if high families fall into low habits they must take the consequences. “You will not forget, officer,” he adds with condescension, “that I am at your

disposal when you please.”

Mr. Bucket (still grave) inquires if to-morrow morning, now, would suit, in case he should be as for’ard as he expects to be. Sir Leicester replies, “All times are alike to me.” Mr. Bucket makes his three bows and is withdrawing when a forgotten point occurs to him.

“Might I ask, by the by,” he says in a low voice, cautiously returning, “who posted the reward-bill on the staircase.”

“I ordered it to be put up there,” replies Sir Leicester.

“Would it be considered a liberty, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, if I was to ask you why?”

“Not at all. I chose it as a conspicuous part of the house. I think it cannot be too prominently kept before the whole establishment. I wish my people to be impressed with the enormity of the crime, the determination to punish it, and the hopelessness of escape. At the same time, officer, if you in your better knowledge of the subject see any objection—”

Mr. Bucket sees none now; the bill having been put up, had better not be taken down. Repeating his three bows he withdraws, closing the door on Volumnia’s little scream, which is a preliminary to her remarking that that charmingly horrible person is a perfect Blue Chamber.

In his fondness for society and his adaptability to all grades, Mr. Bucket is presently standing before the hall-fire—bright and warm on the early winter night—admiring Mercury.

“Why, you’re six foot two, I suppose?” says Mr. Bucket.

“Three,” says Mercury.

“Are you so much? But then, you see, you’re broad in proportion and don’t look it. You’re not one of the weak-legged ones, you ain’t. Was you ever modelled now?” Mr. Bucket asks, conveying the expression of an artist into the turn of his eye and head.

Mercury never was modelled.

“Then you ought to be, you know,” says Mr. Bucket; “and a friend of mine that you’ll hear of one day as a Royal Academy sculptor would stand something handsome to make a drawing of your proportions for the marble. My Lady’s out, ain’t she?”

“Out to dinner.”

“Goes out pretty well every day, don’t she?”

“Yes.”

“Not to be wondered at!” says Mr. Bucket. “Such a fine woman as her, so handsome and so graceful and so elegant, is like a fresh lemon on a dinner-table, ornamental wherever she goes. Was your father in the same way of life as yourself?”

Answer in the negative.

“Mine was,” says Mr. Bucket. “My father was first a page, then a footman, then a butler, then a steward, then an inn-keeper. Lived universally respected, and died lamented. Said with his last breath that he considered service the most honourable part of his career, and so it was. I’ve a brother in service, AND a brother-in-law. My Lady a good temper?”

Mercury replies, “As good as you can expect.”

“Ah!” says Mr. Bucket. “A little spoilt? A little capricious? Lord! What can you anticipate when they’re so handsome as that? And we like ’em all the better for it, don’t we?”

Mercury, with his hands in the pockets of his bright peach-blossom small-clothes, stretches his symmetrical silk legs with the air of a man of gallantry and can’t deny it. Come the roll of wheels and a violent ringing at the bell. “Talk of the angels,” says Mr. Bucket. “Here she is!”

The doors are thrown open, and she passes through the hall. Still very pale, she is dressed in slight mourning and wears two beautiful bracelets. Either their beauty or the beauty of her arms is particularly attractive to Mr. Bucket. He looks at them with an eager eye and rattles something in his pocket—halfpence perhaps.

Noticing him at his distance, she turns an inquiring look on the other Mercury who has brought her home.

“Mr. Bucket, my Lady.”

Mr. Bucket makes a leg and comes forward, passing his familiar demon over the region of his mouth.

“Are you waiting to see Sir Leicester?”

“No, my Lady, I’ve seen him!”

“Have you anything to say to me?”

“Not just at present, my Lady.”

“Have you made any new discoveries?”

“A few, my Lady.”

This is merely in passing. She scarcely makes a stop, and sweeps upstairs alone. Mr. Bucket, moving towards the staircase-foot, watches her

as she goes up the steps the old man came down to his grave, past murderous groups of statuary repeated with their shadowy weapons on the wall, past the printed bill, which she looks at going by, out of view.

"She's a lovely woman, too, she really is," says Mr. Bucket, coming back to Mercury. "Don't look quite healthy though."

Is not quite healthy, Mercury informs him. Suffers much from headaches.

Really? That's a pity! Walking, Mr. Bucket would recommend for that. Well, she tries walking, Mercury rejoins. Walks sometimes for two hours when she has them bad. By night, too.

"Are you sure you're quite so much as six foot three?" asks Mr. Bucket. "Begging your pardon for interrupting you a moment?"

Not a doubt about it.

"You're so well put together that I shouldn't have thought it. But the household troops, though considered fine men, are built so straggling. Walks by night, does she? When it's moonlight, though?"

Oh, yes. When it's moonlight! Of course. Oh, of course! Conversational and acquiescent on both sides.

"I suppose you ain't in the habit of walking yourself?" says Mr. Bucket. "Not much time for it, I should say?"

Besides which, Mercury don't like it. Prefers carriage exercise.

"To be sure," says Mr. Bucket. "That makes a difference. Now I think of it," says Mr. Bucket, warming his hands and looking pleasantly at the blaze, "she went out walking the very night of this business."

"To be sure she did! I let her into the garden over the way."

"And left her there. Certainly you did. I saw you doing it."

"I didn't see YOU," says Mercury.

"I was rather in a hurry," returns Mr. Bucket, "for I was going to visit a aunt of mine that lives at Chelsea—next door but two to the old original Bun House—ninety year old the old lady is, a single woman, and got a little property. Yes, I chanced to be passing at the time. Let's see. What time might it be? It wasn't ten."

"Half-past nine."

"You're right. So it was. And if I don't deceive myself, my Lady was muffled in a loose black mantle, with a deep fringe to it?"

"Of course she was."

Of course she was. Mr. Bucket must return to a little work he has to get on with upstairs, but he must shake hands with Mercury in acknowledgment of his agreeable conversation, and will he—this is all he asks—will he, when he has a leisure half-hour, think of bestowing it on that Royal Academy sculptor, for the advantage of both parties?

CHAPTER LIV

Springing a Mine

REFRESHED BY SLEEP, MR. Bucket rises betimes in the morning and prepares for a field-day. Smartened up by the aid of a clean shirt and a wet hairbrush, with which instrument, on occasions of ceremony, he lubricates such thin locks as remain to him after his life of severe study, Mr. Bucket lays in a breakfast of two mutton chops as a foundation to work upon, together with tea, eggs, toast, and marmalade on a corresponding scale. Having much enjoyed these strengthening matters and having held subtle conference with his familiar demon, he confidently instructs Mercury "just to mention quietly to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, that whenever he's ready for me, I'm ready for him." A gracious message being returned that Sir Leicester will expedite his dressing and join Mr. Bucket in the library within ten minutes, Mr. Bucket repairs to that apartment and stands before the fire with his finger on his chin, looking at the blazing coals.

Thoughtful Mr. Bucket is, as a man may be with weighty work to do, but composed, sure, confident. From the expression of his face he might be a famous whist-player for a large stake—say a hundred guineas certain—with the game in his hand, but with a high reputation involved in his playing his hand out to the last card in a masterly way. Not in the least anxious or disturbed is Mr. Bucket when Sir Leicester appears, but he eyes the baronet aside as he comes slowly to his easy-chair with that observant gravity of yesterday in which there might have been yesterday, but for the audacity of the idea, a touch of compassion.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, officer, but I am rather later than my usual hour this morning. I am not well. The agitation and the indignation from which I have recently suffered have been too much for me. I am subject to—gout"—Sir Leicester was going to say indisposition and would have said it to anybody else, but Mr. Bucket palpably knows all about it—"and recent circumstances have brought it on."

As he takes his seat with some difficulty and with an air of pain, Mr.

Bucket draws a little nearer, standing with one of his large hands on the library-table.

"I am not aware, officer," Sir Leicester observes; raising his eyes to his face, "whether you wish us to be alone, but that is entirely as you please. If you do, well and good. If not, Miss Dedlock would be interested—"

"Why, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," returns Mr. Bucket with his head persuasively on one side and his forefinger pendant at one ear like an earring, "we can't be too private just at present. You will presently see that we can't be too private. A lady, under the circumstances, and especially in Miss Dedlock's elevated station of society, can't but be agreeable to me, but speaking without a view to myself, I will take the liberty of assuring you that I know we can't be too private."

"That is enough."

"So much so, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," Mr. Bucket resumes, "that I was on the point of asking your permission to turn the key in the door."

"By all means." Mr. Bucket skilfully and softly takes that precaution, stooping on his knee for a moment from mere force of habit so to adjust the key in the lock as that no one shall peep in from the outerside.

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I mentioned yesterday evening that I wanted but a very little to complete this case. I have now completed it and collected proof against the person who did this crime."

"Against the soldier?"

"No, Sir Leicester Dedlock; not the soldier."

Sir Leicester looks astounded and inquires, "Is the man in custody?"

Mr. Bucket tells him, after a pause, "It was a woman."

Sir Leicester leans back in his chair, and breathlessly ejaculates, "Good heaven!"

"Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," Mr. Bucket begins, standing over him with one hand spread out on the library-table and the forefinger of the other in impressive use, "it's my duty to prepare you for a train of circumstances that may, and I go so far as to say that will, give you a shock. But Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, you are a gentleman, and I know what a gentleman is and what a gentleman is capable of. A gentleman can bear a shock when it must come, boldly and steadily. A gentleman can make up his mind to stand up against almost any blow. Why, take yourself, Sir

Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. If there's a blow to be inflicted on you, you naturally think of your family. You ask yourself, how would all them ancestors of yours, away to Julius Caesar—not to go beyond him at present—have borne that blow; you remember scores of them that would have borne it well; and you bear it well on their accounts, and to maintain the family credit. That's the way you argue, and that's the way you act, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet."

Sir Leicester, leaning back in his chair and grasping the elbows, sits looking at him with a stony face.

"Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock," proceeds Mr. Bucket, "thus preparing you, let me beg of you not to trouble your mind for a moment as to anything having come to MY knowledge. I know so much about so many characters, high and low, that a piece of information more or less don't signify a straw. I don't suppose there's a move on the board that would surprise ME, and as to this or that move having taken place, why my knowing it is no odds at all, any possible move whatever (provided it's in a wrong direction) being a probable move according to my experience. Therefore, what I say to you, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, is, don't you go and let yourself be put out of the way because of my knowing anything of your family affairs."

"I thank you for your preparation," returns Sir Leicester after a silence, without moving hand, foot, or feature, "which I hope is not necessary; though I give it credit for being well intended. Be so good as to go on. Also"—Sir Leicester seems to shrink in the shadow of his figure—"also, to take a seat, if you have no objection."

None at all. Mr. Bucket brings a chair and diminishes his shadow. "Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, with this short preface I come to the point. Lady Dedlock—"

Sir Leicester raises himself in his seat and stares at him fiercely. Mr. Bucket brings the finger into play as an emollient.

"Lady Dedlock, you see she's universally admired. That's what her ladyship is; she's universally admired," says Mr. Bucket.

"I would greatly prefer, officer," Sir Leicester returns stiffly, "my Lady's name being entirely omitted from this discussion."

"So would I, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, but—it's impossible."

"Impossible?"

Mr. Bucket shakes his relentless head.

“Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, it’s altogether impossible. What I have got to say is about her ladyship. She is the pivot it all turns on.”

“Officer,” retorts Sir Leicester with a fiery eye and a quivering lip, “you know your duty. Do your duty, but be careful not to overstep it. I would not suffer it. I would not endure it. You bring my Lady’s name into this communication upon your responsibility—upon your responsibility. My Lady’s name is not a name for common persons to trifle with!”

“Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I say what I must say, and no more.”

“I hope it may prove so. Very well. Go on. Go on, sir!” Glancing at the angry eyes which now avoid him and at the angry figure trembling from head to foot, yet striving to be still, Mr. Bucket feels his way with his forefinger and in a low voice proceeds.

“Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, it becomes my duty to tell you that the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn long entertained mistrusts and suspicions of Lady Dedlock.”

“If he had dared to breathe them to me, sir—which he never did—I would have killed him myself!” exclaims Sir Leicester, striking his hand upon the table. But in the very heat and fury of the act he stops, fixed by the knowing eyes of Mr. Bucket, whose forefinger is slowly going and who, with mingled confidence and patience, shakes his head.

“Sir Leicester Dedlock, the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn was deep and close, and what he fully had in his mind in the very beginning I can’t quite take upon myself to say. But I know from his lips that he long ago suspected Lady Dedlock of having discovered, through the sight of some handwriting—in this very house, and when you yourself, Sir Leicester Dedlock, were present—the existence, in great poverty, of a certain person who had been her lover before you courted her and who ought to have been her husband.” Mr. Bucket stops and deliberately repeats, “Ought to have been her husband, not a doubt about it. I know from his lips that when that person soon afterwards died, he suspected Lady Dedlock of visiting his wretched lodging and his wretched grave, alone and in secret. I know from my own inquiries and through my eyes and ears that Lady Dedlock did make such visit in the dress of her own maid, for the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn employed me to reckon up her ladyship—if you’ll excuse my making use of the term we commonly employ—and I reckoned her up, so far, completely. I confronted the maid in the chambers in Lincoln’s Inn

Fields with a witness who had been Lady Dedlock's guide, and there couldn't be the shadow of a doubt that she had worn the young woman's dress, unknown to her. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I did endeavour to pave the way a little towards these unpleasant disclosures yesterday by saying that very strange things happened even in high families sometimes. All this, and more, has happened in your own family, and to and through your own Lady. It's my belief that the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn followed up these inquiries to the hour of his death and that he and Lady Dedlock even had bad blood between them upon the matter that very night. Now, only you put that to Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and ask her ladyship whether, even after he had left here, she didn't go down to his chambers with the intention of saying something further to him, dressed in a loose black mantle with a deep fringe to it."

Sir Leicester sits like a statue, gazing at the cruel finger that is probing the life-blood of his heart.

"You put that to her ladyship, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, from me, Inspector Bucket of the Detective. And if her ladyship makes any difficulty about admitting of it, you tell her that it's no use, that Inspector Bucket knows it and knows that she passed the soldier as you called him (though he's not in the army now) and knows that she knows she passed him on the staircase. Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, why do I relate all this?"

Sir Leicester, who has covered his face with his hands, uttering a single groan, requests him to pause for a moment. By and by he takes his hands away, and so preserves his dignity and outward calmness, though there is no more colour in his face than in his white hair, that Mr. Bucket is a little awed by him. Something frozen and fixed is upon his manner, over and above its usual shell of haughtiness, and Mr. Bucket soon detects an unusual slowness in his speech, with now and then a curious trouble in beginning, which occasions him to utter inarticulate sounds. With such sounds he now breaks silence, soon, however, controlling himself to say that he does not comprehend why a gentleman so faithful and zealous as the late Mr. Tulkinghorn should have communicated to him nothing of this painful, this distressing, this unlooked-for, this overwhelming, this incredible intelligence.

"Again, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," returns Mr. Bucket, "put it to her ladyship to clear that up. Put it to her ladyship, if you think it right, from

Inspector Bucket of the Detective. You'll find, or I'm much mistaken, that the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn had the intention of communicating the whole to you as soon as he considered it ripe, and further, that he had given her ladyship so to understand. Why, he might have been going to reveal it the very morning when I examined the body! You don't know what I'm going to say and do five minutes from this present time, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet; and supposing I was to be picked off now, you might wonder why I hadn't done it, don't you see?"

True. Sir Leicester, avoiding, with some trouble those obtrusive sounds, says, "True." At this juncture a considerable noise of voices is heard in the hall. Mr. Bucket, after listening, goes to the library-door, softly unlocks and opens it, and listens again. Then he draws in his head and whispers hurriedly but composedly, "Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, this unfortunate family affair has taken air, as I expected it might, the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn being cut down so sudden. The chance to hush it is to let in these people now in a wrangle with your footmen. Would you mind sitting quiet—on the family account—while I reckon 'em up? And would you just throw in a nod when I seem to ask you for it?"

Sir Leicester indistinctly answers, "Officer. The best you can, the best you can!" and Mr. Bucket, with a nod and a sagacious crook of the forefinger, slips down into the hall, where the voices quickly die away. He is not long in returning; a few paces ahead of Mercury and a brother deity also powdered and in peach-blossomed smalls, who bear between them a chair in which is an incapable old man. Another man and two women come behind. Directing the pitching of the chair in an affable and easy manner, Mr. Bucket dismisses the Mercuries and locks the door again. Sir Leicester looks on at this invasion of the sacred precincts with an icy stare.

"Now, perhaps you may know me, ladies and gentlemen," says Mr. Bucket in a confidential voice. "I am Inspector Bucket of the Detective, I am; and this," producing the tip of his convenient little staff from his breast-pocket, "is my authority. Now, you wanted to see Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. Well! You do see him, and mind you, it ain't every one as is admitted to that honour. Your name, old gentleman, is Smallweed; that's what your name is; I know it well."

"Well, and you never heard any harm of it!" cries Mr. Smallweed in a shrill loud voice.

“You don’t happen to know why they killed the pig, do you?” retorts Mr. Bucket with a steadfast look, but without loss of temper.

“No!”

“Why, they killed him,” says Mr. Bucket, “on account of his having so much cheek. Don’t YOU get into the same position, because it isn’t worthy of you. You ain’t in the habit of conversing with a deaf person, are you?”

“Yes,” snarls Mr. Smallweed, “my wife’s deaf.”

“That accounts for your pitching your voice so high. But as she ain’t here; just pitch it an octave or two lower, will you, and I’ll not only be obliged to you, but it’ll do you more credit,” says Mr. Bucket. “This other gentleman is in the preaching line, I think?”

“Name of Chadband,” Mr. Smallweed puts in, speaking henceforth in a much lower key.

“Once had a friend and brother serjeant of the same name,” says Mr. Bucket, offering his hand, “and consequently feel a liking for it. Mrs. Chadband, no doubt?”

“And Mrs. Snagsby,” Mr. Smallweed introduces.

“Husband a law-stationer and a friend of my own,” says Mr. Bucket. “Love him like a brother! Now, what’s up?”

“Do you mean what business have we come upon?” Mr. Smallweed asks, a little dashed by the suddenness of this turn.

“Ah! You know what I mean. Let us hear what it’s all about in presence of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. Come.”

Mr. Smallweed, beckoning Mr. Chadband, takes a moment’s counsel with him in a whisper. Mr. Chadband, expressing a considerable amount of oil from the pores of his forehead and the palms of his hands, says aloud, “Yes. You first!” and retires to his former place.

“I was the client and friend of Mr. Tulkinghorn,” pipes Grandfather Smallweed then; “I did business with him. I was useful to him, and he was useful to me. Krook, dead and gone, was my brother-in-law. He was own brother to a brimstone magpie—leastways Mrs. Smallweed. I come into Krook’s property. I examined all his papers and all his effects. They was all dug out under my eyes. There was a bundle of letters belonging to a dead and gone lodger as was hid away at the back of a shelf in the side of Lady Jane’s bed—his cat’s bed. He hid all manner of things away, everywheres. Mr. Tulkinghorn wanted ’em and got ’em, but I looked ’em over first. I’m a

man of business, and I took a squint at ’em. They was letters from the lodger’s sweetheart, and she signed Honoria. Dear me, that’s not a common name, Honoria, is it? There’s no lady in this house that signs Honoria is there? Oh, no, I don’t think so! Oh, no, I don’t think so! And not in the same hand, perhaps? Oh, no, I don’t think so!”

Here Mr. Smallweed, seized with a fit of coughing in the midst of his triumph, breaks off to ejaculate, “Oh, dear me! Oh, Lord! I’m shaken all to pieces!”

“Now, when you’re ready,” says Mr. Bucket after awaiting his recovery, “to come to anything that concerns Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, here the gentleman sits, you know.”

“Haven’t I come to it, Mr. Bucket?” cries Grandfather Smallweed. “Isn’t the gentleman concerned yet? Not with Captain Hawdon, and his ever affectionate Honoria, and their child into the bargain? Come, then, I want to know where those letters are. That concerns me, if it don’t concern Sir Leicester Dedlock. I will know where they are. I won’t have ’em disappear so quietly. I handed ’em over to my friend and solicitor, Mr. Tulkinghorn, not to anybody else.”

“Why, he paid you for them, you know, and handsome too,” says Mr. Bucket.

“I don’t care for that. I want to know who’s got ’em. And I tell you what we want—what we all here want, Mr. Bucket. We want more painstaking and search-making into this murder. We know where the interest and the motive was, and you have not done enough. If George the vagabond dragoon had any hand in it, he was only an accomplice, and was set on. You know what I mean as well as any man.”

“Now I tell you what,” says Mr. Bucket, instantaneously altering his manner, coming close to him, and communicating an extraordinary fascination to the forefinger, “I am damned if I am a-going to have my case spoilt, or interfered with, or anticipated by so much as half a second of time by any human being in creation. YOU want more painstaking and search-making! YOU do? Do you see this hand, and do you think that I don’t know the right time to stretch it out and put it on the arm that fired that shot?”

Such is the dread power of the man, and so terribly evident it is that he makes no idle boast, that Mr. Smallweed begins to apologize. Mr. Bucket, dismissing his sudden anger, checks him.

“The advice I give you is, don’t you trouble your head about the murder. That’s my affair. You keep half an eye on the newspapers, and I shouldn’t wonder if you was to read something about it before long, if you look sharp. I know my business, and that’s all I’ve got to say to you on that subject. Now about those letters. You want to know who’s got ’em. I don’t mind telling you. I have got ’em. Is that the packet?”

Mr. Smallweed looks, with greedy eyes, at the little bundle Mr. Bucket produces from a mysterious part of his coat, and identifies it as the same.

“What have you got to say next?” asks Mr. Bucket. “Now, don’t open your mouth too wide, because you don’t look handsome when you do it.”

“I want five hundred pound.”

“No, you don’t; you mean fifty,” says Mr. Bucket humorously.

It appears, however, that Mr. Smallweed means five hundred.

“That is, I am deputed by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to consider (without admitting or promising anything) this bit of business,” says Mr. Bucket—Sir Leicester mechanically bows his head—“and you ask me to consider a proposal of five hundred pounds. Why, it’s an unreasonable proposal! Two fifty would be bad enough, but better than that. Hadn’t you better say two fifty?”

Mr. Smallweed is quite clear that he had better not.

“Then,” says Mr. Bucket, “let’s hear Mr. Chadband. Lord! Many a time I’ve heard my old fellow-serjeant of that name; and a moderate man he was in all respects, as ever I come across!”

Thus invited, Mr. Chadband steps forth, and after a little sleek smiling and a little oil-grinding with the palms of his hands, delivers himself as follows, “My friends, we are now—Rachael, my wife, and I—in the mansions of the rich and great. Why are we now in the mansions of the rich and great, my friends? Is it because we are invited? Because we are bidden to feast with them, because we are bidden to rejoice with them, because we are bidden to play the lute with them, because we are bidden to dance with them? No. Then why are we here, my friends? Air we in possession of a sinful secret, and do we require corn, and wine, and oil, or what is much the same thing, money, for the keeping thereof? Probably so, my friends.”

“You’re a man of business, you are,” returns Mr. Bucket, very attentive, “and consequently you’re going on to mention what the nature of your secret is. You are right. You couldn’t do better.”

“Let us then, my brother, in a spirit of love,” says Mr. Chadband with a cunning eye, “proceed unto it. Rachael, my wife, advance!”

Mrs. Chadband, more than ready, so advances as to jostle her husband into the background and confronts Mr. Bucket with a hard, frowning smile.

“Since you want to know what we know,” says she, “I’ll tell you. I helped to bring up Miss Hawdon, her ladyship’s daughter. I was in the service of her ladyship’s sister, who was very sensitive to the disgrace her ladyship brought upon her, and gave out, even to her ladyship, that the child was dead—she WAS very nearly so—when she was born. But she’s alive, and I know her.” With these words, and a laugh, and laying a bitter stress on the word “ladyship,” Mrs. Chadband folds her arms and looks implacably at Mr. Bucket.

“I suppose now,” returns that officer, “YOU will be expecting a twenty-pound note or a present of about that figure?”

Mrs. Chadband merely laughs and contemptuously tells him he can “offer” twenty pence.

“My friend the law-stationer’s good lady, over there,” says Mr. Bucket, luring Mrs. Snagsby forward with the finger. “What may YOUR game be, ma’am?”

Mrs. Snagsby is at first prevented, by tears and lamentations, from stating the nature of her game, but by degrees it confusedly comes to light that she is a woman overwhelmed with injuries and wrongs, whom Mr. Snagsby has habitually deceived, abandoned, and sought to keep in darkness, and whose chief comfort, under her afflictions, has been the sympathy of the late Mr. Tulkinghorn, who showed so much commiseration for her on one occasion of his calling in Cook’s Court in the absence of her perjured husband that she has of late habitually carried to him all her woes. Everybody it appears, the present company excepted, has plotted against Mrs. Snagsby’s peace. There is Mr. Guppy, clerk to Kenge and Carboy, who was at first as open as the sun at noon, but who suddenly shut up as close as midnight, under the influence—no doubt—of Mr. Snagsby’s suborning and tampering. There is Mr. Weevle, friend of Mr. Guppy, who lived mysteriously up a court, owing to the like coherent causes. There was Krook, deceased; there was Nimrod, deceased; and there was Jo, deceased; and they were “all in it.” In what, Mrs. Snagsby does not with particularity express, but she knows that Jo was Mr. Snagsby’s son, “as well as if a

trumpet had spoken it," and she followed Mr. Snagsby when he went on his last visit to the boy, and if he was not his son why did he go? The one occupation of her life has been, for some time back, to follow Mr. Snagsby to and fro, and up and down, and to piece suspicious circumstances together—and every circumstance that has happened has been most suspicious; and in this way she has pursued her object of detecting and confounding her false husband, night and day. Thus did it come to pass that she brought the Chadbands and Mr. Tulkinghorn together, and conferred with Mr. Tulkinghorn on the change in Mr. Guppy, and helped to turn up the circumstances in which the present company are interested, casually, by the wayside, being still and ever on the great high road that is to terminate in Mr. Snagsby's full exposure and a matrimonial separation. All this, Mrs. Snagsby, as an injured woman, and the friend of Mrs. Chadband, and the follower of Mr. Chadband, and the mourner of the late Mr. Tulkinghorn, is here to certify under the seal of confidence, with every possible confusion and involvement possible and impossible, having no pecuniary motive whatever, no scheme or project but the one mentioned, and bringing here, and taking everywhere, her own dense atmosphere of dust, arising from the ceaseless working of her mill of jealousy.

While this exordium is in hand—and it takes some time—Mr. Bucket, who has seen through the transparency of Mrs. Snagsby's vinegar at a glance, confers with his familiar demon and bestows his shrewd attention on the Chadbands and Mr. Smallweed. Sir Leicester Dedlock remains immovable, with the same icy surface upon him, except that he once or twice looks towards Mr. Bucket, as relying on that officer alone of all mankind.

"Very good," says Mr. Bucket. "Now I understand you, you know, and being deputed by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to look into this little matter," again Sir Leicester mechanically bows in confirmation of the statement, "can give it my fair and full attention. Now I won't allude to conspiring to extort money or anything of that sort, because we are men and women of the world here, and our object is to make things pleasant. But I tell you what I DO wonder at; I am surprised that you should think of making a noise below in the hall. It was so opposed to your interests. That's what I look at."

"We wanted to get in," pleads Mr. Smallweed.

“Why, of course you wanted to get in,” Mr. Bucket asserts with cheerfulness; “but for a old gentleman at your time of life—what I call truly venerable, mind you!—with his wits sharpened, as I have no doubt they are, by the loss of the use of his limbs, which occasions all his animation to mount up into his head, not to consider that if he don’t keep such a business as the present as close as possible it can’t be worth a mag to him, is so curious! You see your temper got the better of you; that’s where you lost ground,” says Mr. Bucket in an argumentative and friendly way.

“I only said I wouldn’t go without one of the servants came up to Sir Leicester Dedlock,” returns Mr. Smallweed.

“That’s it! That’s where your temper got the better of you. Now, you keep it under another time and you’ll make money by it. Shall I ring for them to carry you down?”

“When are we to hear more of this?” Mrs. Chadband sternly demands.

“Bless your heart for a true woman! Always curious, your delightful sex is!” replies Mr. Bucket with gallantry. “I shall have the pleasure of giving you a call to-morrow or next day—not forgetting Mr. Smallweed and his proposal of two fifty.”

“Five hundred!” exclaims Mr. Smallweed.

“All right! Nominally five hundred.” Mr. Bucket has his hand on the bell-rope. “SHALL I wish you good day for the present on the part of myself and the gentleman of the house?” he asks in an insinuating tone.

Nobody having the hardihood to object to his doing so, he does it, and the party retire as they came up. Mr. Bucket follows them to the door, and returning, says with an air of serious business, “Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, it’s for you to consider whether or not to buy this up. I should recommend, on the whole, it’s being bought up myself; and I think it may be bought pretty cheap. You see, that little pickled cowcumber of a Mrs. Snagsby has been used by all sides of the speculation and has done a deal more harm in bringing odds and ends together than if she had meant it. Mr. Tulkinghorn, deceased, he held all these horses in his hand and could have drove ’em his own way, I haven’t a doubt; but he was fetched off the box head-foremost, and now they have got their legs over the traces, and are all dragging and pulling their own ways. So it is, and such is life. The cat’s away, and the mice they play; the frost breaks up, and the water runs. Now, with regard to the party to be apprehended.”

Sir Leicester seems to wake, though his eyes have been wide open, and he looks intently at Mr. Bucket as Mr. Bucket refers to his watch.

“The party to be apprehended is now in this house,” proceeds Mr. Bucket, putting up his watch with a steady hand and with rising spirits, “and I’m about to take her into custody in your presence. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, don’t you say a word nor yet stir. There’ll be no noise and no disturbance at all. I’ll come back in the course of the evening, if agreeable to you, and endeavour to meet your wishes respecting this unfortunate family matter and the nobbiest way of keeping it quiet. Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, don’t you be nervous on account of the apprehension at present coming off. You shall see the whole case clear, from first to last.”

Mr. Bucket rings, goes to the door, briefly whispers Mercury, shuts the door, and stands behind it with his arms folded. After a suspense of a minute or two the door slowly opens and a Frenchwoman enters. Mademoiselle Hortense.

The moment she is in the room Mr. Bucket claps the door to and puts his back against it. The suddenness of the noise occasions her to turn, and then for the first time she sees Sir Leicester Dedlock in his chair.

“I ask you pardon,” she mutters hurriedly. “They tell me there was no one here.”

Her step towards the door brings her front to front with Mr. Bucket. Suddenly a spasm shoots across her face and she turns deadly pale.

“This is my lodger, Sir Leicester Dedlock,” says Mr. Bucket, nodding at her. “This foreign young woman has been my lodger for some weeks back.”

“What do Sir Leicester care for that, you think, my angel?” returns mademoiselle in a jocular strain.

“Why, my angel,” returns Mr. Bucket, “we shall see.”

Mademoiselle Hortense eyes him with a scowl upon her tight face, which gradually changes into a smile of scorn, “You are very mysterieuse. Are you drunk?”

“Tolerable sober, my angel,” returns Mr. Bucket.

“I come from arriving at this so detestable house with your wife. Your wife have left me since some minutes. They tell me downstairs that your wife is here. I come here, and your wife is not here. What is the intention of this fool’s play, say then?” mademoiselle demands, with her arms composedly crossed, but with something in her dark cheek beating like a

clock.

Mr. Bucket merely shakes the finger at her.

“Ah, my God, you are an unhappy idiot!” cries mademoiselle with a toss of her head and a laugh. “Leave me to pass downstairs, great pig.” With a stamp of her foot and a menace.

“Now, mademoiselle,” says Mr. Bucket in a cool determined way, “you go and sit down upon that sofy.”

“I will not sit down upon nothing,” she replies with a shower of nods.

“Now, mademoiselle,” repeats Mr. Bucket, making no demonstration except with the finger, “you sit down upon that sofy.”

“Why?”

“Because I take you into custody on a charge of murder, and you don’t need to be told it. Now, I want to be polite to one of your sex and a foreigner if I can. If I can’t, I must be rough, and there’s rougher ones outside. What I am to be depends on you. So I recommend you, as a friend, afore another half a blessed moment has passed over your head, to go and sit down upon that sofy.”

Mademoiselle complies, saying in a concentrated voice while that something in her cheek beats fast and hard, “You are a devil.”

“Now, you see,” Mr. Bucket proceeds approvingly, “you’re comfortable and conducting yourself as I should expect a foreign young woman of your sense to do. So I’ll give you a piece of advice, and it’s this, don’t you talk too much. You’re not expected to say anything here, and you can’t keep too quiet a tongue in your head. In short, the less you PARLAY, the better, you know.” Mr. Bucket is very complacent over this French explanation.

Mademoiselle, with that tigerish expansion of the mouth and her black eyes darting fire upon him, sits upright on the sofa in a rigid state, with her hands clenched—and her feet too, one might suppose—muttering, “Oh, you Bucket, you are a devil!”

“Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,” says Mr. Bucket, and from this time forth the finger never rests, “this young woman, my lodger, was her ladyship’s maid at the time I have mentioned to you; and this young woman, besides being extraordinary vehement and passionate against her ladyship after being discharged—”

“Lie!” cries mademoiselle. “I discharge myself.”

“Now, why don’t you take my advice?” returns Mr. Bucket in an

impressive, almost in an imploring, tone. “I’m surprised at the indiscreetness you commit. You’ll say something that’ll be used against you, you know. You’re sure to come to it. Never you mind what I say till it’s given in evidence. It is not addressed to you.”

“Discharge, too,” cries mademoiselle furiously, “by her ladyship! Eh, my faith, a pretty ladyship! Why, I r-r-r-ruin my character by remaining with a ladyship so infame!”

“Upon my soul I wonder at you!” Mr. Bucket remonstrates. “I thought the French were a polite nation, I did, really. Yet to hear a female going on like that before Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet!”

“He is a poor abused!” cries mademoiselle. “I spit upon his house, upon his name, upon his imbecility,” all of which she makes the carpet represent. “Oh, that he is a great man! Oh, yes, superb! Oh, heaven! Bah!”

“Well, Sir Leicester Dedlock,” proceeds Mr. Bucket, “this intemperate foreigner also angrily took it into her head that she had established a claim upon Mr. Tulkinghorn, deceased, by attending on the occasion I told you of at his chambers, though she was liberally paid for her time and trouble.”

“Lie!” cries mademoiselle. “I ref-use his money all togezzer.”

“If you WILL PARLAY, you know,” says Mr. Bucket parenthetically, “you must take the consequences. Now, whether she became my lodger, Sir Leicester Dedlock, with any deliberate intention then of doing this deed and blinding me, I give no opinion on; but she lived in my house in that capacity at the time that she was hovering about the chambers of the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn with a view to a wrangle, and likewise persecuting and half frightening the life out of an unfortunate stationer.”

“Lie!” cries mademoiselle. “All lie!”

“The murder was committed, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and you know under what circumstances. Now, I beg of you to follow me close with your attention for a minute or two. I was sent for, and the case was entrusted to me. I examined the place, and the body, and the papers, and everything. From information I received (from a clerk in the same house) I took George into custody as having been seen hanging about there on the night, and at very nigh the time of the murder, also as having been overheard in high words with the deceased on former occasions—even threatening him, as the witness made out. If you ask me, Sir Leicester Dedlock, whether from the first I believed George to be the murderer, I tell you candidly no, but he

might be, notwithstanding, and there was enough against him to make it my duty to take him and get him kept under remand. Now, observe!”

As Mr. Bucket bends forward in some excitement—for him—and inaugurates what he is going to say with one ghostly beat of his forefinger in the air, Mademoiselle Hortense fixes her black eyes upon him with a dark frown and sets her dry lips closely and firmly together.

“I went home, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, at night and found this young woman having supper with my wife, Mrs. Bucket. She had made a mighty show of being fond of Mrs. Bucket from her first offering herself as our lodger, but that night she made more than ever—in fact, overdid it. Likewise she overdid her respect, and all that, for the lamented memory of the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn. By the living Lord it flashed upon me, as I sat opposite to her at the table and saw her with a knife in her hand, that she had done it!”

Mademoiselle is hardly audible in straining through her teeth and lips the words, “You are a devil.”

“Now where,” pursues Mr. Bucket, “had she been on the night of the murder? She had been to the theayter. (She really was there, I have since found, both before the deed and after it.) I knew I had an artful customer to deal with and that proof would be very difficult; and I laid a trap for her—such a trap as I never laid yet, and such a venture as I never made yet. I worked it out in my mind while I was talking to her at supper. When I went upstairs to bed, our house being small and this young woman’s ears sharp, I stuffed the sheet into Mrs. Bucket’s mouth that she shouldn’t say a word of surprise and told her all about it. My dear, don’t you give your mind to that again, or I shall link your feet together at the ankles.” Mr. Bucket, breaking off, has made a noiseless descent upon mademoiselle and laid his heavy hand upon her shoulder.

“What is the matter with you now?” she asks him.

“Don’t you think any more,” returns Mr. Bucket with admonitory finger, “of throwing yourself out of window. That’s what’s the matter with me. Come! Just take my arm. You needn’t get up; I’ll sit down by you. Now take my arm, will you? I’m a married man, you know; you’re acquainted with my wife. Just take my arm.”

Vainly endeavouring to moisten those dry lips, with a painful sound she struggles with herself and complies.

“Now we’re all right again. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, this case could never have been the case it is but for Mrs. Bucket, who is a woman in fifty thousand—in a hundred and fifty thousand! To throw this young woman off her guard, I have never set foot in our house since, though I’ve communicated with Mrs. Bucket in the baker’s loaves and in the milk as often as required. My whispered words to Mrs. Bucket when she had the sheet in her mouth were, ‘My dear, can you throw her off continually with natural accounts of my suspicions against George, and this, and that, and t’other? Can you do without rest and keep watch upon her night and day? Can you undertake to say, ‘She shall do nothing without my knowledge, she shall be my prisoner without suspecting it, she shall no more escape from me than from death, and her life shall be my life, and her soul my soul, till I have got her, if she did this murder?’ Mrs. Bucket says to me, as well as she could speak on account of the sheet, ‘Bucket, I can!’ And she has acted up to it glorious!”

“Lies!” mademoiselle interposes. “All lies, my friend!”

“Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, how did my calculations come out under these circumstances? When I calculated that this impetuous young woman would overdo it in new directions, was I wrong or right? I was right. What does she try to do? Don’t let it give you a turn? To throw the murder on her ladyship.”

Sir Leicester rises from his chair and staggers down again.

“And she got encouragement in it from hearing that I was always here, which was done a-purpose. Now, open that pocket-book of mine, Sir Leicester Dedlock, if I may take the liberty of throwing it towards you, and look at the letters sent to me, each with the two words ‘Lady Dedlock’ in it. Open the one directed to yourself, which I stopped this very morning, and read the three words ‘Lady Dedlock, Murderess’ in it. These letters have been falling about like a shower of lady-birds. What do you say now to Mrs. Bucket, from her spy-place having seen them all ‘written by this young woman? What do you say to Mrs. Bucket having, within this half-hour, secured the corresponding ink and paper, fellow half-sheets and what not? What do you say to Mrs. Bucket having watched the posting of ’em every one by this young woman, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet?” Mr. Bucket asks, triumphant in his admiration of his lady’s genius.

Two things are especially observable as Mr. Bucket proceeds to a

conclusion. First, that he seems imperceptibly to establish a dreadful right of property in mademoiselle. Secondly, that the very atmosphere she breathes seems to narrow and contract about her as if a close net or a pall were being drawn nearer and yet nearer around her breathless figure.

"There is no doubt that her ladyship was on the spot at the eventful period," says Mr. Bucket, "and my foreign friend here saw her, I believe, from the upper part of the staircase. Her ladyship and George and my foreign friend were all pretty close on one another's heels. But that don't signify any more, so I'll not go into it. I found the wadding of the pistol with which the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn was shot. It was a bit of the printed description of your house at Chesney Wold. Not much in that, you'll say, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. No. But when my foreign friend here is so thoroughly off her guard as to think it a safe time to tear up the rest of that leaf, and when Mrs. Bucket puts the pieces together and finds the wadding wanting, it begins to look like Queer Street."

"These are very long lies," mademoiselle interposes. "You prose great deal. Is it that you have almost all finished, or are you speaking always?"

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," proceeds Mr. Bucket, who delights in a full title and does violence to himself when he dispenses with any fragment of it, "the last point in the case which I am now going to mention shows the necessity of patience in our business, and never doing a thing in a hurry. I watched this young woman yesterday without her knowledge when she was looking at the funeral, in company with my wife, who planned to take her there; and I had so much to convict her, and I saw such an expression in her face, and my mind so rose against her malice towards her ladyship, and the time was altogether such a time for bringing down what you may call retribution upon her, that if I had been a younger hand with less experience, I should have taken her, certain. Equally, last night, when her ladyship, as is so universally admired I am sure, come home looking—why, Lord, a man might almost say like Venus rising from the ocean—it was so unpleasant and inconsistent to think of her being charged with a murder of which she was innocent that I felt quite to want to put an end to the job. What should I have lost? Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I should have lost the weapon. My prisoner here proposed to Mrs. Bucket, after the departure of the funeral, that they should go per bus a little ways into the country and take tea at a very decent house of entertainment. Now, near that

house of entertainment there's a piece of water. At tea, my prisoner got up to fetch her pocket handkercher from the bedroom where the bonnets was; she was rather a long time gone and came back a little out of wind. As soon as they came home this was reported to me by Mrs. Bucket, along with her observations and suspicions. I had the piece of water dragged by moonlight, in presence of a couple of our men, and the pocket pistol was brought up before it had been there half-a-dozen hours. Now, my dear, put your arm a little further through mine, and hold it steady, and I shan't hurt you!"

In a trice Mr. Bucket snaps a handcuff on her wrist. "That's one," says Mr. Bucket. "Now the other, darling. Two, and all told!"

He rises; she rises too. "Where," she asks him, darkening her large eyes until their drooping lids almost conceal them—and yet they stare, "where is your false, your treacherous, and cursed wife?"

"She's gone forrard to the Police Office," returns Mr. Bucket. "You'll see her there, my dear."

"I would like to kiss her!" exclaims Mademoiselle Hortense, panting tigress-like.

"You'd bite her, I suspect," says Mr. Bucket.

"I would!" making her eyes very large. "I would love to tear her limb from limb."

"Bless you, darling," says Mr. Bucket with the greatest composure, "I'm fully prepared to hear that. Your sex have such a surprising animosity against one another when you do differ. You don't mind me half so much, do you?"

"No. Though you are a devil still."

"Angel and devil by turns, eh?" cries Mr. Bucket. "But I am in my regular employment, you must consider. Let me put your shawl tidy. I've been lady's maid to a good many before now. Anything wanting to the bonnet? There's a cab at the door."

Mademoiselle Hortense, casting an indignant eye at the glass, shakes herself perfectly neat in one shake and looks, to do her justice, uncommonly genteel.

"Listen then, my angel," says she after several sarcastic nods. "You are very spiritual. But can you restore him back to life?"

Mr. Bucket answers, "Not exactly."

"That is droll. Listen yet one time. You are very spiritual. Can you make

a honourable lady of her?”

“Don’t be so malicious,” says Mr. Bucket.

“Or a haughty gentleman of HIM?” cries mademoiselle, referring to Sir Leicester with ineffable disdain. “Eh! Oh, then regard him! The poor infant! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

“Come, come, why this is worse PARLAYING than the other,” says Mr. Bucket. “Come along!”

“You cannot do these things? Then you can do as you please with me. It is but the death, it is all the same. Let us go, my angel. Adieu, you old man, grey. I pity you, and I despise you!”

With these last words she snaps her teeth together as if her mouth closed with a spring. It is impossible to describe how Mr. Bucket gets her out, but he accomplishes that feat in a manner so peculiar to himself, enfolding and pervading her like a cloud, and hovering away with her as if he were a homely Jupiter and she the object of his affections.

Sir Leicester, left alone, remains in the same attitude, as though he were still listening and his attention were still occupied. At length he gazes round the empty room, and finding it deserted, rises unsteadily to his feet, pushes back his chair, and walks a few steps, supporting himself by the table. Then he stops, and with more of those inarticulate sounds, lifts up his eyes and seems to stare at something.

Heaven knows what he sees. The green, green woods of Chesney Wold, the noble house, the pictures of his forefathers, strangers defacing them, officers of police coarsely handling his most precious heirlooms, thousands of fingers pointing at him, thousands of faces sneering at him. But if such shadows flit before him to his bewilderment, there is one other shadow which he can name with something like distinctness even yet and to which alone he addresses his tearing of his white hair and his extended arms.

It is she in association with whom, saving that she has been for years a main fibre of the root of his dignity and pride, he has never had a selfish thought. It is she whom he has loved, admired, honoured, and set up for the world to respect. It is she who, at the core of all the constrained formalities and conventionalities of his life, has been a stock of living tenderness and love, susceptible as nothing else is of being struck with the agony he feels. He sees her, almost to the exclusion of himself, and cannot bear to look upon her cast down from the high place she has graced so well.

And even to the point of his sinking on the ground, oblivious of his suffering, he can yet pronounce her name with something like distinctness in the midst of those intrusive sounds, and in a tone of mourning and compassion rather than reproach.

CHAPTER LV

Flight

INSPECTOR BUCKET OF THE Detective has not yet struck his great blow, as just now chronicled, but is yet refreshing himself with sleep preparatory to his field-day, when through the night and along the freezing wintry roads a chaise and pair comes out of Lincolnshire, making its way towards London.

Railroads shall soon traverse all this country, and with a rattle and a glare the engine and train shall shoot like a meteor over the wide night-landscape, turning the moon paler; but as yet such things are non-existent in these parts, though not wholly unexpected. Preparations are afoot, measurements are made, ground is staked out. Bridges are begun, and their not yet united piers desolately look at one another over roads and streams like brick and mortar couples with an obstacle to their union; fragments of embankments are thrown up and left as precipices with torrents of rusty carts and barrows tumbling over them; tripods of tall poles appear on hilltops, where there are rumours of tunnels; everything looks chaotic and abandoned in full hopelessness. Along the freezing roads, and through the night, the post-chaise makes its way without a railroad on its mind.

Mrs. Rouncewell, so many years housekeeper at Chesney Wold, sits within the chaise; and by her side sits Mrs. Bagnet with her grey cloak and umbrella. The old girl would prefer the bar in front, as being exposed to the weather and a primitive sort of perch more in accordance with her usual course of travelling, but Mrs. Rouncewell is too thoughtful of her comfort to admit of her proposing it. The old lady cannot make enough of the old girl. She sits, in her stately manner, holding her hand, and regardless of its roughness, puts it often to her lips. “You are a mother, my dear soul,” says she many times, “and you found out my George’s mother!”

“Why, George,” returns Mrs. Bagnet, “was always free with me, ma’am, and when he said at our house to my Woolwich that of all the things my Woolwich could have to think of when he grew to be a man, the comfortablest would be that he had never brought a sorrowful line into his

mother's face or turned a hair of her head grey, then I felt sure, from his way, that something fresh had brought his own mother into his mind. I had often known him say to me, in past times, that he had behaved bad to her."

"Never, my dear!" returns Mrs. Rouncewell, bursting into tears. "My blessing on him, never! He was always fond of me, and loving to me, was my George! But he had a bold spirit, and he ran a little wild and went for a soldier. And I know he waited at first, in letting us know about himself, till he should rise to be an officer; and when he didn't rise, I know he considered himself beneath us, and wouldn't be a disgrace to us. For he had a lion heart, had my George, always from a baby!"

The old lady's hands stray about her as of yore, while she recalls, all in a tremble, what a likely lad, what a fine lad, what a gay good-humoured clever lad he was; how they all took to him down at Chesney Wold; how Sir Leicester took to him when he was a young gentleman; how the dogs took to him; how even the people who had been angry with him forgave him the moment he was gone, poor boy. And now to see him after all, and in a prison too! And the broad stomacher heaves, and the quaint upright old-fashioned figure bends under its load of affectionate distress.

Mrs. Bagnet, with the instinctive skill of a good warm heart, leaves the old housekeeper to her emotions for a little while—not without passing the back of her hand across her own motherly eyes—and presently chirps up in her cheery manner, "So I says to George when I goes to call him in to tea (he pretended to be smoking his pipe outside), 'What ails you this afternoon, George, for gracious sake? I have seen all sorts, and I have seen you pretty often in season and out of season, abroad and at home, and I never see you so melancholy penitent.' 'Why, Mrs. Bagnet,' says George, 'it's because I AM melancholy and penitent both, this afternoon, that you see me so.' 'What have you done, old fellow?' I says. 'Why, Mrs. Bagnet,' says George, shaking his head, 'what I have done has been done this many a long year, and is best not tried to be undone now. If I ever get to heaven it won't be for being a good son to a widowed mother; I say no more.' Now, ma'am, when George says to me that it's best not tried to be undone now, I have my thoughts as I have often had before, and I draw it out of George how he comes to have such things on him that afternoon. Then George tells me that he has seen by chance, at the lawyer's office, a fine old lady that has brought his mother plain before him, and he runs on about that old lady

till he quite forgets himself and paints her picture to me as she used to be, years upon years back. So I says to George when he has done, who is this old lady he has seen? And George tells me it's Mrs. Rouncewell, housekeeper for more than half a century to the Dedlock family down at Chesney Wold in Lincolnshire. George has frequently told me before that he's a Lincolnshire man, and I says to my old Lignum that night, 'Lignum, that's his mother for five and for-ty pound!'"

All this Mrs. Bagnet now relates for the twentieth time at least within the last four hours. Trilling it out like a kind of bird, with a pretty high note, that it may be audible to the old lady above the hum of the wheels.

"Bless you, and thank you," says Mrs. Rouncewell. "Bless you, and thank you, my worthy soul!"

"Dear heart!" cries Mrs. Bagnet in the most natural manner. "No thanks to me, I am sure. Thanks to yourself, ma'am, for being so ready to pay 'em! And mind once more, ma'am, what you had best do on finding George to be your own son is to make him—for your sake—have every sort of help to put himself in the right and clear himself of a charge of which he is as innocent as you or me. It won't do to have truth and justice on his side; he must have law and lawyers," exclaims the old girl, apparently persuaded that the latter form a separate establishment and have dissolved partnership with truth and justice for ever and a day.

"He shall have," says Mrs. Rouncewell, "all the help that can be got for him in the world, my dear. I will spend all I have, and thankfully, to procure it. Sir Leicester will do his best, the whole family will do their best. I—I know something, my dear; and will make my own appeal, as his mother parted from him all these years, and finding him in a jail at last."

The extreme disquietude of the old housekeeper's manner in saying this, her broken words, and her wringing of her hands make a powerful impression on Mrs. Bagnet and would astonish her but that she refers them all to her sorrow for her son's condition. And yet Mrs. Bagnet wonders too why Mrs. Rouncewell should murmur so distractedly, "My Lady, my Lady, my Lady!" over and over again.

The frosty night wears away, and the dawn breaks, and the post-chaise comes rolling on through the early mist like the ghost of a chaise departed. It has plenty of spectral company in ghosts of trees and hedges, slowly vanishing and giving place to the realities of day. London reached, the

travellers alight, the old housekeeper in great tribulation and confusion, Mrs. Bagnet quite fresh and collected—as she would be if her next point, with no new equipage and outfit, were the Cape of Good Hope, the Island of Ascension, Hong Kong, or any other military station.

But when they set out for the prison where the trooper is confined, the old lady has managed to draw about her, with her lavender-coloured dress, much of the staid calmness which is its usual accompaniment. A wonderfully grave, precise, and handsome piece of old china she looks, though her heart beats fast and her stomacher is ruffled more than even the remembrance of this wayward son has ruffled it these many years.

Approaching the cell, they find the door opening and a warder in the act of coming out. The old girl promptly makes a sign of entreaty to him to say nothing; assenting with a nod, he suffers them to enter as he shuts the door.

So George, who is writing at his table, supposing himself to be alone, does not raise his eyes, but remains absorbed. The old housekeeper looks at him, and those wandering hands of hers are quite enough for Mrs. Bagnet's confirmation, even if she could see the mother and the son together, knowing what she knows, and doubt their relationship.

Not a rustle of the housekeeper's dress, not a gesture, not a word betrays her. She stands looking at him as he writes on, all unconscious, and only her fluttering hands give utterance to her emotions. But they are very eloquent, very, very eloquent. Mrs. Bagnet understands them. They speak of gratitude, of joy, of grief, of hope; of inextinguishable affection, cherished with no return since this stalwart man was a stripling; of a better son loved less, and this son loved so fondly and so proudly; and they speak in such touching language that Mrs. Bagnet's eyes brim up with tears and they run glistening down her sun-brown face.

"George Rouncewell! Oh, my dear child, turn and look at me!"

The trooper starts up, clasps his mother round the neck, and falls down on his knees before her. Whether in a late repentance, whether in the first association that comes back upon him, he puts his hands together as a child does when it says its prayers, and raising them towards her breast, bows down his head, and cries.

"My George, my dearest son! Always my favourite, and my favourite still, where have you been these cruel years and years? Grown such a man too, grown such a fine strong man. Grown so like what I knew he must be,

if it pleased God he was alive!”

She can ask, and he can answer, nothing connected for a time. All that time the old girl, turned away, leans one arm against the whitened wall, leans her honest forehead upon it, wipes her eyes with her serviceable grey cloak, and quite enjoys herself like the best of old girls as she is.

“Mother,” says the trooper when they are more composed, “forgive me first of all, for I know my need of it.”

Forgive him! She does it with all her heart and soul. She always has done it. She tells him how she has had it written in her will, these many years, that he was her beloved son George. She has never believed any ill of him, never. If she had died without this happiness—and she is an old woman now and can’t look to live very long—she would have blessed him with her last breath, if she had had her senses, as her beloved son George.

“Mother, I have been an undutiful trouble to you, and I have my reward; but of late years I have had a kind of glimmering of a purpose in me too. When I left home I didn’t care much, mother—I am afraid not a great deal—for leaving; and went away and ’listed, harum-scarum, making believe to think that I cared for nobody, no not I, and that nobody cared for me.”

The trooper has dried his eyes and put away his handkerchief, but there is an extraordinary contrast between his habitual manner of expressing himself and carrying himself and the softened tone in which he speaks, interrupted occasionally by a half-stifled sob.

“So I wrote a line home, mother, as you too well know, to say I had ’listed under another name, and I went abroad. Abroad, at one time I thought I would write home next year, when I might be better off; and when that year was out, I thought I would write home next year, when I might be better off; and when that year was out again, perhaps I didn’t think much about it. So on, from year to year, through a service of ten years, till I began to get older, and to ask myself why should I ever write.”

“I don’t find any fault, child—but not to ease my mind, George? Not a word to your loving mother, who was growing older too?”

This almost overturns the trooper afresh, but he sets himself up with a great, rough, sounding clearance of his throat.

“Heaven forgive me, mother, but I thought there would be small consolation then in hearing anything about me. There were you, respected and esteemed. There was my brother, as I read in chance North Country

papers now and then, rising to be prosperous and famous. There was I a dragoon, roving, unsettled, not self-made like him, but self-unmade—all my earlier advantages thrown away, all my little learning unlearnt, nothing picked up but what unfitted me for most things that I could think of. What business had I to make myself known? After letting all that time go by me, what good could come of it? The worst was past with you, mother. I knew by that time (being a man) how you had mourned for me, and wept for me, and prayed for me; and the pain was over, or was softened down, and I was better in your mind as it was."

The old lady sorrowfully shakes her head, and taking one of his powerful hands, lays it lovingly upon her shoulder.

"No, I don't say that it was so, mother, but that I made it out to be so. I said just now, what good could come of it? Well, my dear mother, some good might have come of it to myself—and there was the meanness of it. You would have sought me out; you would have purchased my discharge; you would have taken me down to Chesney Wold; you would have brought me and my brother and my brother's family together; you would all have considered anxiously how to do something for me and set me up as a respectable civilian. But how could any of you feel sure of me when I couldn't so much as feel sure of myself? How could you help regarding as an incumbrance and a discredit to you an idle dragooning chap who was an incumbrance and a discredit to himself, excepting under discipline? How could I look my brother's children in the face and pretend to set them an example—I, the vagabond boy who had run away from home and been the grief and unhappiness of my mother's life? 'No, George.' Such were my words, mother, when I passed this in review before me: 'You have made your bed. Now, lie upon it.'"

Mrs. Rouncewell, drawing up her stately form, shakes her head at the old girl with a swelling pride upon her, as much as to say, "I told you so!" The old girl relieves her feelings and testifies her interest in the conversation by giving the trooper a great poke between the shoulders with her umbrella; this action she afterwards repeats, at intervals, in a species of affectionate lunacy, never failing, after the administration of each of these remonstrances, to resort to the whitened wall and the grey cloak again.

"This was the way I brought myself to think, mother, that my best amends was to lie upon that bed I had made, and die upon it. And I should

have done it (though I have been to see you more than once down at Chesney Wold, when you little thought of me) but for my old comrade's wife here, who I find has been too many for me. But I thank her for it. I thank you for it, Mrs. Bagnet, with all my heart and might."

To which Mrs. Bagnet responds with two pokes.

And now the old lady impresses upon her son George, her own dear recovered boy, her joy and pride, the light of her eyes, the happy close of her life, and every fond name she can think of, that he must be governed by the best advice obtainable by money and influence, that he must yield up his case to the greatest lawyers that can be got, that he must act in this serious plight as he shall be advised to act and must not be self-willed, however right, but must promise to think only of his poor old mother's anxiety and suffering until he is released, or he will break her heart.

"Mother, 'tis little enough to consent to," returns the trooper, stopping her with a kiss; "tell me what I shall do, and I'll make a late beginning and do it. Mrs. Bagnet, you'll take care of my mother, I know?"

A very hard poke from the old girl's umbrella.

"If you'll bring her acquainted with Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Summerson, she will find them of her way of thinking, and they will give her the best advice and assistance."

"And, George," says the old lady, "we must send with all haste for your brother. He is a sensible sound man as they tell me—out in the world beyond Chesney Wold, my dear, though I don't know much of it myself—and will be of great service."

"Mother," returns the trooper, "is it too soon to ask a favour?"

"Surely not, my dear."

"Then grant me this one great favour. Don't let my brother know."

"Not know what, my dear?"

"Not know of me. In fact, mother, I can't bear it; I can't make up my mind to it. He has proved himself so different from me and has done so much to raise himself while I've been soldiering that I haven't brass enough in my composition to see him in this place and under this charge. How could a man like him be expected to have any pleasure in such a discovery? It's impossible. No, keep my secret from him, mother; do me a greater kindness than I deserve and keep my secret from my brother, of all men."

"But not always, dear George?"

“Why, mother, perhaps not for good and all—though I may come to ask that too—but keep it now, I do entreat you. If it’s ever broke to him that his rip of a brother has turned up, I could wish,” says the trooper, shaking his head very doubtfully, “to break it myself and be governed as to advancing or retreating by the way in which he seems to take it.”

As he evidently has a rooted feeling on this point, and as the depth of it is recognized in Mrs. Bagnet’s face, his mother yields her implicit assent to what he asks. For this he thanks her kindly.

“In all other respects, my dear mother, I’ll be as tractable and obedient as you can wish; on this one alone, I stand out. So now I am ready even for the lawyers. I have been drawing up,” he glances at his writing on the table, “an exact account of what I knew of the deceased and how I came to be involved in this unfortunate affair. It’s entered, plain and regular, like an orderly-book; not a word in it but what’s wanted for the facts. I did intend to read it, straight on end, whensoever I was called upon to say anything in my defence. I hope I may be let to do it still; but I have no longer a will of my own in this case, and whatever is said or done, I give my promise not to have any.”

Matters being brought to this so far satisfactory pass, and time being on the wane, Mrs. Bagnet proposes a departure. Again and again the old lady hangs upon her son’s neck, and again and again the trooper holds her to his broad chest.

“Where are you going to take my mother, Mrs. Bagnet?”

“I am going to the town house, my dear, the family house. I have some business there that must be looked to directly,” Mrs. Rouncewell answers.

“Will you see my mother safe there in a coach, Mrs. Bagnet? But of course I know you will. Why should I ask it!”

Why indeed, Mrs. Bagnet expresses with the umbrella.

“Take her, my old friend, and take my gratitude along with you. Kisses to Quebec and Malta, love to my godson, a hearty shake of the hand to Lignum, and this for yourself, and I wish it was ten thousand pound in gold, my dear!” So saying, the trooper puts his lips to the old girl’s tanned forehead, and the door shuts upon him in his cell.

No entreaties on the part of the good old housekeeper will induce Mrs. Bagnet to retain the coach for her own conveyance home. Jumping out cheerfully at the door of the Dedlock mansion and handing Mrs.

Rouncewell up the steps, the old girl shakes hands and trudges off, arriving soon afterwards in the bosom of the Bagnet family and falling to washing the greens as if nothing had happened.

My Lady is in that room in which she held her last conference with the murdered man, and is sitting where she sat that night, and is looking at the spot where he stood upon the hearth studying her so leisurely, when a tap comes at the door. Who is it? Mrs. Rouncewell. What has brought Mrs. Rouncewell to town so unexpectedly?

“Trouble, my Lady. Sad trouble. Oh, my Lady, may I beg a word with you?”

What new occurrence is it that makes this tranquil old woman tremble so? Far happier than her Lady, as her Lady has often thought, why does she falter in this manner and look at her with such strange mistrust?

“What is the matter? Sit down and take your breath.”

“Oh, my Lady, my Lady. I have found my son—my youngest, who went away for a soldier so long ago. And he is in prison.”

“For debt?”

“Oh, no, my Lady; I would have paid any debt, and joyful.”

“For what is he in prison then?”

“Charged with a murder, my Lady, of which he is as innocent as—as I am. Accused of the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn.”

What does she mean by this look and this imploring gesture? Why does she come so close? What is the letter that she holds?

“Lady Dedlock, my dear Lady, my good Lady, my kind Lady! You must have a heart to feel for me, you must have a heart to forgive me. I was in this family before you were born. I am devoted to it. But think of my dear son wrongfully accused.”

“I do not accuse him.”

“No, my Lady, no. But others do, and he is in prison and in danger. Oh, Lady Dedlock, if you can say but a word to help to clear him, say it!”

What delusion can this be? What power does she suppose is in the person she petitions to avert this unjust suspicion, if it be unjust? Her Lady’s handsome eyes regard her with astonishment, almost with fear.

“My Lady, I came away last night from Chesney Wold to find my son in my old age, and the step upon the Ghost’s Walk was so constant and so solemn that I never heard the like in all these years. Night after night, as it

has fallen dark, the sound has echoed through your rooms, but last night it was awfullest. And as it fell dark last night, my Lady, I got this letter."

"What letter is it?"

"Hush! Hush!" The housekeeper looks round and answers in a frightened whisper, "My Lady, I have not breathed a word of it, I don't believe what's written in it, I know it can't be true, I am sure and certain that it is not true. But my son is in danger, and you must have a heart to pity me. If you know of anything that is not known to others, if you have any suspicion, if you have any clue at all, and any reason for keeping it in your own breast, oh, my dear Lady, think of me, and conquer that reason, and let it be known! This is the most I consider possible. I know you are not a hard lady, but you go your own way always without help, and you are not familiar with your friends; and all who admire you—and all do—as a beautiful and elegant lady, know you to be one far away from themselves who can't be approached close. My Lady, you may have some proud or angry reasons for disdaining to utter something that you know; if so, pray, oh, pray, think of a faithful servant whose whole life has been passed in this family which she dearly loves, and relent, and help to clear my son! My Lady, my good Lady," the old housekeeper pleads with genuine simplicity, "I am so humble in my place and you are by nature so high and distant that you may not think what I feel for my child, but I feel so much that I have come here to make so bold as to beg and pray you not to be scornful of us if you can do us any right or justice at this fearful time!"

Lady Dedlock raises her without one word, until she takes the letter from her hand.

"Am I to read this?"

"When I am gone, my Lady, if you please, and then remembering the most that I consider possible."

"I know of nothing I can do. I know of nothing I reserve that can affect your son. I have never accused him."

"My Lady, you may pity him the more under a false accusation after reading the letter."

The old housekeeper leaves her with the letter in her hand. In truth she is not a hard lady naturally, and the time has been when the sight of the venerable figure suing to her with such strong earnestness would have moved her to great compassion. But so long accustomed to suppress

emotion and keep down reality, so long schooled for her own purposes in that destructive school which shuts up the natural feelings of the heart like flies in amber and spreads one uniform and dreary gloss over the good and bad, the feeling and the unfeeling, the sensible and the senseless, she had subdued even her wonder until now.

She opens the letter. Spread out upon the paper is a printed account of the discovery of the body as it lay face downward on the floor, shot through the heart; and underneath is written her own name, with the word "murderess" attached.

It falls out of her hand. How long it may have lain upon the ground she knows not, but it lies where it fell when a servant stands before her announcing the young man of the name of Guppy. The words have probably been repeated several times, for they are ringing in her head before she begins to understand them.

"Let him come in!"

He comes in. Holding the letter in her hand, which she has taken from the floor, she tries to collect her thoughts. In the eyes of Mr. Guppy she is the same Lady Dedlock, holding the same prepared, proud, chilling state.

"Your ladyship may not be at first disposed to excuse this visit from one who has never been welcome to your ladyship"—which he don't complain of, for he is bound to confess that there never has been any particular reason on the face of things why he should be—"but I hope when I mention my motives to your ladyship you will not find fault with me," says Mr. Guppy.

"Do so."

"Thank your ladyship. I ought first to explain to your ladyship," Mr. Guppy sits on the edge of a chair and puts his hat on the carpet at his feet, "that Miss Summerson, whose image, as I formerly mentioned to your ladyship, was at one period of my life imprinted on my 'eart until erased by circumstances over which I had no control, communicated to me, after I had the pleasure of waiting on your ladyship last, that she particularly wished me to take no steps whatever in any manner at all relating to her. And Miss Summerson's wishes being to me a law (except as connected with circumstances over which I have no control), I consequently never expected to have the distinguished honour of waiting on your ladyship again."

And yet he is here now, Lady Dedlock moodily reminds him.

"And yet I am here now," Mr. Guppy admits. "My object being to

communicate to your ladyship, under the seal of confidence, why I am here."

He cannot do so, she tells him, too plainly or too briefly. "Nor can I," Mr. Guppy returns with a sense of injury upon him, "too particularly request your ladyship to take particular notice that it's no personal affair of mine that brings me here. I have no interested views of my own to serve in coming here. If it was not for my promise to Miss Summerson and my keeping of it sacred—I, in point of fact, shouldn't have darkened these doors again, but should have seen 'em further first."

Mr. Guppy considers this a favourable moment for sticking up his hair with both hands.

"Your ladyship will remember when I mention it that the last time I was here I run against a party very eminent in our profession and whose loss we all deplore. That party certainly did from that time apply himself to cutting in against me in a way that I will call sharp practice, and did make it, at every turn and point, extremely difficult for me to be sure that I hadn't inadvertently led up to something contrary to Miss Summerson's wishes. Self-praise is no recommendation, but I may say for myself that I am not so bad a man of business neither."

Lady Dedlock looks at him in stern inquiry. Mr. Guppy immediately withdraws his eyes from her face and looks anywhere else.

"Indeed, it has been made so hard," he goes on, "to have any idea what that party was up to in combination with others that until the loss which we all deplore I was gravelled—an expression which your ladyship, moving in the higher circles, will be so good as to consider tantamount to knocked over. Small likewise—a name by which I refer to another party, a friend of mine that your ladyship is not acquainted with—got to be so close and double-faced that at times it wasn't easy to keep one's hands off his 'ead. However, what with the exertion of my humble abilities, and what with the help of a mutual friend by the name of Mr. Tony Weevle (who is of a high aristocratic turn and has your ladyship's portrait always hanging up in his room), I have now reasons for an apprehension as to which I come to put your ladyship upon your guard. First, will your ladyship allow me to ask you whether you have had any strange visitors this morning? I don't mean fashionable visitors, but such visitors, for instance, as Miss Barbary's old servant, or as a person without the use of his lower extremities, carried

upstairs similarly to a guy?”

“No!”

“Then I assure your ladyship that such visitors have been here and have been received here. Because I saw them at the door, and waited at the corner of the square till they came out, and took half an hour’s turn afterwards to avoid them.”

“What have I to do with that, or what have you? I do not understand you. What do you mean?”

“Your ladyship, I come to put you on your guard. There may be no occasion for it. Very well. Then I have only done my best to keep my promise to Miss Summerson. I strongly suspect (from what Small has dropped, and from what we have corkscrewed out of him) that those letters I was to have brought to your ladyship were not destroyed when I supposed they were. That if there was anything to be blown upon, it IS blown upon. That the visitors I have alluded to have been here this morning to make money of it. And that the money is made, or making.”

Mr. Guppy picks up his hat and rises.

“Your ladyship, you know best whether there’s anything in what I say or whether there’s nothing. Something or nothing, I have acted up to Miss Summerson’s wishes in letting things alone and in undoing what I had begun to do, as far as possible; that’s sufficient for me. In case I should be taking a liberty in putting your ladyship on your guard when there’s no necessity for it, you will endeavour, I should hope, to outlive my presumption, and I shall endeavour to outlive your disapprobation. I now take my farewell of your ladyship, and assure you that there’s no danger of your ever being waited on by me again.”

She scarcely acknowledges these parting words by any look, but when he has been gone a little while, she rings her bell.

“Where is Sir Leicester?”

Mercury reports that he is at present shut up in the library alone.

“Has Sir Leicester had any visitors this morning?”

Several, on business. Mercury proceeds to a description of them, which has been anticipated by Mr. Guppy. Enough; he may go.

So! All is broken down. Her name is in these many mouths, her husband knows his wrongs, her shame will be published—may be spreading while she thinks about it—and in addition to the thunderbolt so long foreseen by

her, so unforeseen by him, she is denounced by an invisible accuser as the murderess of her enemy.

Her enemy he was, and she has often, often, often wished him dead. Her enemy he is, even in his grave. This dreadful accusation comes upon her like a new torment at his lifeless hand. And when she recalls how she was secretly at his door that night, and how she may be represented to have sent her favourite girl away so soon before merely to release herself from observation, she shudders as if the hangman's hands were at her neck.

She has thrown herself upon the floor and lies with her hair all wildly scattered and her face buried in the cushions of a couch. She rises up, hurries to and fro, flings herself down again, and rocks and moans. The horror that is upon her is unutterable. If she really were the murderess, it could hardly be, for the moment, more intense.

For as her murderous perspective, before the doing of the deed, however subtle the precautions for its commission, would have been closed up by a gigantic dilatation of the hateful figure, preventing her from seeing any consequences beyond it; and as those consequences would have rushed in, in an unimagined flood, the moment the figure was laid low—which always happens when a murder is done; so, now she sees that when he used to be on the watch before her, and she used to think, "if some mortal stroke would but fall on this old man and take him from my way!" it was but wishing that all he held against her in his hand might be flung to the winds and chance-sown in many places. So, too, with the wicked relief she has felt in his death. What was his death but the key-stone of a gloomy arch removed, and now the arch begins to fall in a thousand fragments, each crushing and mangling piecemeal!

Thus, a terrible impression steals upon and overshadows her that from this pursuer, living or dead—obdurate and imperturbable before her in his well-remembered shape, or not more obdurate and imperturbable in his coffin-bed—there is no escape but in death. Hunted, she flies. The complication of her shame, her dread, remorse, and misery, overwhelms her at its height; and even her strength of self-reliance is overturned and whirled away like a leaf before a mighty wind.

She hurriedly addresses these lines to her husband, seals, and leaves them on her table:

> If I am sought for, or accused of, his murder, believe that I am wholly innocent. Believe no other good of me, for I am innocent of nothing else that you have heard, or will hear, laid to my charge. He prepared me, on that fatal night, for his disclosure of my guilt to you. After he had left me, I went out on pretence of walking in the garden where I sometimes walk, but really to follow him and make one last petition that he would not protract the dreadful suspense on which I have been racked by him, you do not know how long, but would mercifully strike next morning.
>
> I found his house dark and silent. I rang twice at his door, but there was no reply, and I came home.
>
> I have no home left. I will encumber you no more. May you, in your just resentment, be able to forget the unworthy woman on whom you have wasted a most generous devotion—who avoids you only with a deeper shame than that with which she hurries from herself—and who writes this last adieu.

She veils and dresses quickly, leaves all her jewels and her money, listens, goes downstairs at a moment when the hall is empty, opens and shuts the great door, flutters away in the shrill frosty wind.

CHAPTER LVI

Pursuit

IMPASSIVE, AS BEHOVES ITS high breeding, the Dedlock town house stares at the other houses in the street of dismal grandeur and gives no outward sign of anything going wrong within. Carriages rattle, doors are battered at, the world exchanges calls; ancient charmers with skeleton throats and peachy cheeks that have a rather ghastly bloom upon them seen by daylight, when indeed these fascinating creatures look like Death and the Lady fused together, dazzle the eyes of men. Forth from the frigid mews come easily swinging carriages guided by short-legged coachmen in flaxen wigs, deep sunk into downy hammercloths, and up behind mount luscious Mercuries bearing sticks of state and wearing cocked hats broadwise, a spectacle for the angels.

The Dedlock town house changes not externally, and hours pass before its exalted dullness is disturbed within. But Volumnia the fair, being subject to the prevalent complaint of boredom and finding that disorder attacking her spirits with some virulence, ventures at length to repair to the library for change of scene. Her gentle tapping at the door producing no response, she opens it and peeps in; seeing no one there, takes possession.

The sprightly Dedlock is reputed, in that grass-grown city of the ancients, Bath, to be stimulated by an urgent curiosity which impels her on all convenient and inconvenient occasions to sidle about with a golden glass at her eye, peering into objects of every description. Certain it is that she avails herself of the present opportunity of hovering over her kinsman’s letters and papers like a bird, taking a short peck at this document and a blink with her head on one side at that document, and hopping about from table to table with her glass at her eye in an inquisitive and restless manner. In the course of these researches she stumbles over something, and turning her glass in that direction, sees her kinsman lying on the ground like a felled tree.

Volumnia’s pet little scream acquires a considerable augmentation of

reality from this surprise, and the house is quickly in commotion. Servants tear up and down stairs, bells are violently rung, doctors are sent for, and Lady Dedlock is sought in all directions, but not found. Nobody has seen or heard her since she last rang her bell. Her letter to Sir Leicester is discovered on her table, but it is doubtful yet whether he has not received another missive from another world requiring to be personally answered, and all the living languages, and all the dead, are as one to him.

They lay him down upon his bed, and chafe, and rub, and fan, and put ice to his head, and try every means of restoration. Howbeit, the day has ebbed away, and it is night in his room before his stertorous breathing lulls or his fixed eyes show any consciousness of the candle that is occasionally passed before them. But when this change begins, it goes on; and by and by he nods or moves his eyes or even his hand in token that he hears and comprehends.

He fell down, this morning, a handsome stately gentleman, somewhat infirm, but of a fine presence, and with a well-filled face. He lies upon his bed, an aged man with sunken cheeks, the decrepit shadow of himself. His voice was rich and mellow and he had so long been thoroughly persuaded of the weight and import to mankind of any word he said that his words really had come to sound as if there were something in them. But now he can only whisper, and what he whispers sounds like what it is—mere jumble and jargon.

His favourite and faithful housekeeper stands at his bedside. It is the first act he notices, and he clearly derives pleasure from it. After vainly trying to make himself understood in speech, he makes signs for a pencil. So inexpressively that they cannot at first understand him; it is his old housekeeper who makes out what he wants and brings in a slate.

After pausing for some time, he slowly scrawls upon it in a hand that is not his, “Chesney Wold?”

No, she tells him; he is in London. He was taken ill in the library this morning. Right thankful she is that she happened to come to London and is able to attend upon him.

“It is not an illness of any serious consequence, Sir Leicester. You will be much better to-morrow, Sir Leicester. All the gentlemen say so.” This, with the tears coursing down her fair old face.

After making a survey of the room and looking with particular attention

all round the bed where the doctors stand, he writes, “My Lady.”

“My Lady went out, Sir Leicester, before you were taken ill, and don’t know of your illness yet.”

He points again, in great agitation, at the two words. They all try to quiet him, but he points again with increased agitation. On their looking at one another, not knowing what to say, he takes the slate once more and writes “My Lady. For God’s sake, where?” And makes an imploring moan.

It is thought better that his old housekeeper should give him Lady Dedlock’s letter, the contents of which no one knows or can surmise. She opens it for him and puts it out for his perusal. Having read it twice by a great effort, he turns it down so that it shall not be seen and lies moaning. He passes into a kind of relapse or into a swoon, and it is an hour before he opens his eyes, reclining on his faithful and attached old servant’s arm. The doctors know that he is best with her, and when not actively engaged about him, stand aloof.

The slate comes into requisition again, but the word he wants to write he cannot remember. His anxiety, his eagerness, and affliction at this pass are pitiable to behold. It seems as if he must go mad in the necessity he feels for haste and the inability under which he labours of expressing to do what or to fetch whom. He has written the letter B, and there stopped. Of a sudden, in the height of his misery, he puts Mr. before it. The old housekeeper suggests Bucket. Thank heaven! That’s his meaning.

Mr. Bucket is found to be downstairs, by appointment. Shall he come up?

There is no possibility of misconstruing Sir Leicester’s burning wish to see him or the desire he signifies to have the room cleared of every one but the housekeeper. It is speedily done, and Mr. Bucket appears. Of all men upon earth, Sir Leicester seems fallen from his high estate to place his sole trust and reliance upon this man.

“Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I’m sorry to see you like this. I hope you’ll cheer up. I’m sure you will, on account of the family credit.”

Sir Leicester puts her letter in his hands and looks intently in his face while he reads it. A new intelligence comes into Mr. Bucket’s eye as he reads on; with one hook of his finger, while that eye is still glancing over the words, he indicates, “Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I understand you.”

Sir Leicester writes upon the slate. “Full forgiveness. Find—” Mr.

Bucket stops his hand.

“Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I’ll find her. But my search after her must be begun out of hand. Not a minute must be lost.”

With the quickness of thought, he follows Sir Leicester Dedlock’s look towards a little box upon a table.

“Bring it here, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet? Certainly. Open it with one of these here keys? Certainly. The littlest key? TO be sure. Take the notes out? So I will. Count ’em? That’s soon done. Twenty and thirty’s fifty, and twenty’s seventy, and fifty’s one twenty, and forty’s one sixty. Take ’em for expenses? That I’ll do, and render an account of course. Don’t spare money? No I won’t.”

The velocity and certainty of Mr. Bucket’s interpretation on all these heads is little short of miraculous. Mrs. Rouncewell, who holds the light, is giddy with the swiftness of his eyes and hands as he starts up, furnished for his journey.

“You’re George’s mother, old lady; that’s about what you are, I believe?” says Mr. Bucket aside, with his hat already on and buttoning his coat.

“Yes, sir, I am his distressed mother.”

“So I thought, according to what he mentioned to me just now. Well, then, I’ll tell you something. You needn’t be distressed no more. Your son’s all right. Now, don’t you begin a-crying, because what you’ve got to do is to take care of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and you won’t do that by crying. As to your son, he’s all right, I tell you; and he sends his loving duty, and hoping you’re the same. He’s discharged honourable; that’s about what HE is; with no more imputation on his character than there is on yours, and yours is a tidy one, I’LL bet a pound. You may trust me, for I took your son. He conducted himself in a game way, too, on that occasion; and he’s a fine-made man, and you’re a fine-made old lady, and you’re a mother and son, the pair of you, as might be showed for models in a caravan. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, what you’ve trusted to me I’ll go through with. Don’t you be afraid of my turning out of my way, right or left, or taking a sleep, or a wash, or a shave till I have found what I go in search of. Say everything as is kind and forgiving on your part? Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I will. And I wish you better, and these family affairs smoothed over—as, Lord, many other family affairs equally has been, and equally will be, to the end of time.”

With this peroration, Mr. Bucket, buttoned up, goes quietly out, looking steadily before him as if he were already piercing the night in quest of the fugitive.

His first step is to take himself to Lady Dedlock's rooms and look all over them for any trifling indication that may help him. The rooms are in darkness now; and to see Mr. Bucket with a wax-light in his hand, holding it above his head and taking a sharp mental inventory of the many delicate objects so curiously at variance with himself, would be to see a sight—which nobody DOES see, as he is particular to lock himself in.

"A spicy boudoir, this," says Mr. Bucket, who feels in a manner furbished up in his French by the blow of the morning. "Must have cost a sight of money. Rum articles to cut away from, these; she must have been hard put to it!"

Opening and shutting table-drawers and looking into caskets and jewel-cases, he sees the reflection of himself in various mirrors, and moralizes thereon.

"One might suppose I was a-moving in the fashionable circles and getting myself up for almac's," says Mr. Bucket. "I begin to think I must be a swell in the Guards without knowing it."

Ever looking about, he has opened a dainty little chest in an inner drawer. His great hand, turning over some gloves which it can scarcely feel, they are so light and soft within it, comes upon a white handkerchief.

"Hum! Let's have a look at YOU," says Mr. Bucket, putting down the light. "What should YOU be kept by yourself for? What's YOUR motive? Are you her ladyship's property, or somebody else's? You've got a mark upon you somewheres or another, I suppose?"

He finds it as he speaks, "Esther Summerson."

"Oh!" says Mr. Bucket, pausing, with his finger at his ear. "Come, I'll take YOU."

He completes his observations as quietly and carefully as he has carried them on, leaves everything else precisely as he found it, glides away after some five minutes in all, and passes into the street. With a glance upward at the dimly lighted windows of Sir Leicester's room, he sets off, full-swing, to the nearest coach-stand, picks out the horse for his money, and directs to be driven to the shooting gallery. Mr. Bucket does not claim to be a scientific judge of horses, but he lays out a little money on the principal

events in that line, and generally sums up his knowledge of the subject in the remark that when he sees a horse as can go, he knows him.

His knowledge is not at fault in the present instance. Clattering over the stones at a dangerous pace, yet thoughtfully bringing his keen eyes to bear on every slinking creature whom he passes in the midnight streets, and even on the lights in upper windows where people are going or gone to bed, and on all the turnings that he rattles by, and alike on the heavy sky, and on the earth where the snow lies thin—for something may present itself to assist him, anywhere—he dashes to his destination at such a speed that when he stops the horse half smothers him in a cloud of steam.

"Unbear him half a moment to freshen him up, and I'll be back."

He runs up the long wooden entry and finds the trooper smoking his pipe.

"I thought I should, George, after what you have gone through, my lad. I haven't a word to spare. Now, honour! All to save a woman. Miss Summerson that was here when Gridley died—that was the name, I know—all right—where does she live?"

The trooper has just come from there and gives him the address, near Oxford Street.

"You won't repent it, George. Good night!"

He is off again, with an impression of having seen Phil sitting by the frosty fire staring at him open-mouthed, and gallops away again, and gets out in a cloud of steam again.

Mr. Jarndyce, the only person up in the house, is just going to bed, rises from his book on hearing the rapid ringing at the bell, and comes down to the door in his dressing-gown.

"Don't be alarmed, sir." In a moment his visitor is confidential with him in the hall, has shut the door, and stands with his hand upon the lock. "I've had the pleasure of seeing you before. Inspector Bucket. Look at that handkerchief, sir, Miss Esther Summerson's. Found it myself put away in a drawer of Lady Dedlock's, quarter of an hour ago. Not a moment to lose. Matter of life or death. You know Lady Dedlock?"

"Yes."

"There has been a discovery there to-day. Family affairs have come out. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, has had a fit—apoplexy or paralysis—and couldn't be brought to, and precious time has been lost. Lady Dedlock

disappeared this afternoon and left a letter for him that looks bad. Run your eye over it. Here it is!”

Mr. Jarndyce, having read it, asks him what he thinks.

“I don’t know. It looks like suicide. Anyways, there’s more and more danger, every minute, of its drawing to that. I’d give a hundred pound an hour to have got the start of the present time. Now, Mr. Jarndyce, I am employed by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to follow her and find her, to save her and take her his forgiveness. I have money and full power, but I want something else. I want Miss Summerson.”

Mr. Jarndyce in a troubled voice repeats, “Miss Summerson?”

“Now, Mr. Jarndyce”—Mr. Bucket has read his face with the greatest attention all along—“I speak to you as a gentleman of a humane heart, and under such pressing circumstances as don’t often happen. If ever delay was dangerous, it’s dangerous now; and if ever you couldn’t afterwards forgive yourself for causing it, this is the time. Eight or ten hours, worth, as I tell you, a hundred pound apiece at least, have been lost since Lady Dedlock disappeared. I am charged to find her. I am Inspector Bucket. Besides all the rest that’s heavy on her, she has upon her, as she believes, suspicion of murder. If I follow her alone, she, being in ignorance of what Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, has communicated to me, may be driven to desperation. But if I follow her in company with a young lady, answering to the description of a young lady that she has a tenderness for—I ask no question, and I say no more than that—she will give me credit for being friendly. Let me come up with her and be able to have the hold upon her of putting that young lady for’ard, and I’ll save her and prevail with her if she is alive. Let me come up with her alone—a hard matter—and I’ll do my best, but I don’t answer for what the best may be. Time flies; it’s getting on for one o’clock. When one strikes, there’s another hour gone, and it’s worth a thousand pound now instead of a hundred.”

This is all true, and the pressing nature of the case cannot be questioned. Mr. Jarndyce begs him to remain there while he speaks to Miss Summerson. Mr. Bucket says he will, but acting on his usual principle, does no such thing, following upstairs instead and keeping his man in sight. So he remains, dodging and lurking about in the gloom of the staircase while they confer. In a very little time Mr. Jarndyce comes down and tells him that Miss Summerson will join him directly and place herself under his

protection to accompany him where he pleases. Mr. Bucket, satisfied, expresses high approval and awaits her coming at the door.

There he mounts a high tower in his mind and looks out far and wide. Many solitary figures he perceives creeping through the streets; many solitary figures out on heaths, and roads, and lying under haystacks. But the figure that he seeks is not among them. Other solitaries he perceives, in nooks of bridges, looking over; and in shadowed places down by the river's level; and a dark, dark, shapeless object drifting with the tide, more solitary than all, clings with a drowning hold on his attention.

Where is she? Living or dead, where is she? If, as he folds the handkerchief and carefully puts it up, it were able with an enchanted power to bring before him the place where she found it and the night-landscape near the cottage where it covered the little child, would he descry her there? On the waste where the brick-kilns are burning with a pale blue flare, where the straw-roofs of the wretched huts in which the bricks are made are being scattered by the wind, where the clay and water are hard frozen and the mill in which the gaunt blind horse goes round all day looks like an instrument of human torture—traversing this deserted, blighted spot there is a lonely figure with the sad world to itself, pelted by the snow and driven by the wind, and cast out, it would seem, from all companionship. It is the figure of a woman, too; but it is miserably dressed, and no such clothes ever came through the hall and out at the great door of the Dedlock mansion.

CHAPTER LVII

Esther’s Narrative

I HAD GONE TO bed and fallen asleep when my guardian knocked at the door of my room and begged me to get up directly. On my hurrying to speak to him and learn what had happened, he told me, after a word or two of preparation, that there had been a discovery at Sir Leicester Dedlock’s. That my mother had fled, that a person was now at our door who was empowered to convey to her the fullest assurances of affectionate protection and forgiveness if he could possibly find her, and that I was sought for to accompany him in the hope that my entreaties might prevail upon her if his failed. Something to this general purpose I made out, but I was thrown into such a tumult of alarm, and hurry and distress, that in spite of every effort I could make to subdue my agitation, I did not seem, to myself, fully to recover my right mind until hours had passed.

But I dressed and wrapped up expeditiously without waking Charley or any one and went down to Mr. Bucket, who was the person entrusted with the secret. In taking me to him my guardian told me this, and also explained how it was that he had come to think of me. Mr. Bucket, in a low voice, by the light of my guardian’s candle, read to me in the hall a letter that my mother had left upon her table; and I suppose within ten minutes of my having been aroused I was sitting beside him, rolling swiftly through the streets.

His manner was very keen, and yet considerate when he explained to me that a great deal might depend on my being able to answer, without confusion, a few questions that he wished to ask me. These were, chiefly, whether I had had much communication with my mother (to whom he only referred as Lady Dedlock), when and where I had spoken with her last, and how she had become possessed of my handkerchief. When I had satisfied him on these points, he asked me particularly to consider—taking time to think—whether within my knowledge there was any one, no matter where, in whom she might be at all likely to confide under circumstances of the

last necessity. I could think of no one but my guardian. But by and by I mentioned Mr. Boythorn. He came into my mind as connected with his old chivalrous manner of mentioning my mother's name and with what my guardian had informed me of his engagement to her sister and his unconscious connexion with her unhappy story.

My companion had stopped the driver while we held this conversation, that we might the better hear each other. He now told him to go on again and said to me, after considering within himself for a few moments, that he had made up his mind how to proceed. He was quite willing to tell me what his plan was, but I did not feel clear enough to understand it.

We had not driven very far from our lodgings when we stopped in a by-street at a public-looking place lighted up with gas. Mr. Bucket took me in and sat me in an arm-chair by a bright fire. It was now past one, as I saw by the clock against the wall. Two police officers, looking in their perfectly neat uniform not at all like people who were up all night, were quietly writing at a desk; and the place seemed very quiet altogether, except for some beating and calling out at distant doors underground, to which nobody paid any attention.

A third man in uniform, whom Mr. Bucket called and to whom he whispered his instructions, went out; and then the two others advised together while one wrote from Mr. Bucket's subdued dictation. It was a description of my mother that they were busy with, for Mr. Bucket brought it to me when it was done and read it in a whisper. It was very accurate indeed.

The second officer, who had attended to it closely, then copied it out and called in another man in uniform (there were several in an outer room), who took it up and went away with it. All this was done with the greatest dispatch and without the waste of a moment; yet nobody was at all hurried. As soon as the paper was sent out upon its travels, the two officers resumed their former quiet work of writing with neatness and care. Mr. Bucket thoughtfully came and warmed the soles of his boots, first one and then the other, at the fire.

"Are you well wrapped up, Miss Summerson?" he asked me as his eyes met mine. "It's a desperate sharp night for a young lady to be out in."

I told him I cared for no weather and was warmly clothed.

"It may be a long job," he observed; "but so that it ends well, never

mind, miss."

"I pray to heaven it may end well!" said I.

He nodded comfortingly. "You see, whatever you do, don't you go and fret yourself. You keep yourself cool and equal for anything that may happen, and it'll be the better for you, the better for me, the better for Lady Dedlock, and the better for Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet."

He was really very kind and gentle, and as he stood before the fire warming his boots and rubbing his face with his forefinger, I felt a confidence in his sagacity which reassured me. It was not yet a quarter to two when I heard horses' feet and wheels outside. "Now, Miss Summerson," said he, "we are off, if you please!"

He gave me his arm, and the two officers courteously bowed me out, and we found at the door a phaeton or barouche with a postilion and post horses. Mr. Bucket handed me in and took his own seat on the box. The man in uniform whom he had sent to fetch this equipage then handed him up a dark lantern at his request, and when he had given a few directions to the driver, we rattled away.

I was far from sure that I was not in a dream. We rattled with great rapidity through such a labyrinth of streets that I soon lost all idea where we were, except that we had crossed and re-crossed the river, and still seemed to be traversing a low-lying, waterside, dense neighbourhood of narrow thoroughfares chequered by docks and basins, high piles of warehouses, swing-bridges, and masts of ships. At length we stopped at the corner of a little slimy turning, which the wind from the river, rushing up it, did not purify; and I saw my companion, by the light of his lantern, in conference with several men who looked like a mixture of police and sailors. Against the mouldering wall by which they stood, there was a bill, on which I could discern the words, "Found Drowned"; and this and an inscription about drags possessed me with the awful suspicion shadowed forth in our visit to that place.

I had no need to remind myself that I was not there by the indulgence of any feeling of mine to increase the difficulties of the search, or to lessen its hopes, or enhance its delays. I remained quiet, but what I suffered in that dreadful spot I never can forget. And still it was like the horror of a dream. A man yet dark and muddy, in long swollen sodden boots and a hat like them, was called out of a boat and whispered with Mr. Bucket, who went

away with him down some slippery steps—as if to look at something secret that he had to show. They came back, wiping their hands upon their coats, after turning over something wet; but thank God it was not what I feared!

After some further conference, Mr. Bucket (whom everybody seemed to know and defer to) went in with the others at a door and left me in the carriage, while the driver walked up and down by his horses to warm himself. The tide was coming in, as I judged from the sound it made, and I could hear it break at the end of the alley with a little rush towards me. It never did so—and I thought it did so, hundreds of times, in what can have been at the most a quarter of an hour, and probably was less—but the thought shuddered through me that it would cast my mother at the horses' feet.

Mr. Bucket came out again, exhorting the others to be vigilant, darkened his lantern, and once more took his seat. "Don't you be alarmed, Miss Summerson, on account of our coming down here," he said, turning to me. "I only want to have everything in train and to know that it is in train by looking after it myself. Get on, my lad!"

We appeared to retrace the way we had come. Not that I had taken note of any particular objects in my perturbed state of mind, but judging from the general character of the streets. We called at another office or station for a minute and crossed the river again. During the whole of this time, and during the whole search, my companion, wrapped up on the box, never relaxed in his vigilance a single moment; but when we crossed the bridge he seemed, if possible, to be more on the alert than before. He stood up to look over the parapet, he alighted and went back after a shadowy female figure that flitted past us, and he gazed into the profound black pit of water with a face that made my heart die within me. The river had a fearful look, so overcast and secret, creeping away so fast between the low flat lines of shore—so heavy with indistinct and awful shapes, both of substance and shadow; so death-like and mysterious. I have seen it many times since then, by sunlight and by moonlight, but never free from the impressions of that journey. In my memory the lights upon the bridge are always burning dim, the cutting wind is eddying round the homeless woman whom we pass, the monotonous wheels are whirling on, and the light of the carriage-lamps reflected back looks palely in upon me—a face rising out of the dreaded water.

Clattering and clattering through the empty streets, we came at length from the pavement on to dark smooth roads and began to leave the houses behind us. After a while I recognized the familiar way to Saint Albans. At Barnet fresh horses were ready for us, and we changed and went on. It was very cold indeed, and the open country was white with snow, though none was falling then.

"An old acquaintance of yours, this road, Miss Summerson," said Mr. Bucket cheerfully.

"Yes," I returned. "Have you gathered any intelligence?"

"None that can be quite depended on as yet," he answered, "but it's early times as yet."

He had gone into every late or early public-house where there was a light (they were not a few at that time, the road being then much frequented by drovers) and had got down to talk to the turnpike-keepers. I had heard him ordering drink, and chinking money, and making himself agreeable and merry everywhere; but whenever he took his seat upon the box again, his face resumed its watchful steady look, and he always said to the driver in the same business tone, "Get on, my lad!"

With all these stoppages, it was between five and six o'clock and we were yet a few miles short of Saint Albans when he came out of one of these houses and handed me in a cup of tea.

"Drink it, Miss Summerson, it'll do you good. You're beginning to get more yourself now, ain't you?"

I thanked him and said I hoped so.

"You was what you may call stunned at first," he returned; "and Lord, no wonder! Don't speak loud, my dear. It's all right. She's on ahead."

I don't know what joyful exclamation I made or was going to make, but he put up his finger and I stopped myself.

"Passed through here on foot this evening about eight or nine. I heard of her first at the archway toll, over at Highgate, but couldn't make quite sure. Traced her all along, on and off. Picked her up at one place, and dropped her at another; but she's before us now, safe. Take hold of this cup and saucer, ostler. Now, if you wasn't brought up to the butter trade, look out and see if you can catch half a crown in your t'other hand. One, two, three, and there you are! Now, my lad, try a gallop!"

We were soon in Saint Albans and alighted a little before day, when I

was just beginning to arrange and comprehend the occurrences of the night and really to believe that they were not a dream. Leaving the carriage at the posting-house and ordering fresh horses to be ready, my companion gave me his arm, and we went towards home.

"As this is your regular abode, Miss Summerson, you see," he observed, "I should like to know whether you've been asked for by any stranger answering the description, or whether Mr. Jarndyce has. I don't much expect it, but it might be."

As we ascended the hill, he looked about him with a sharp eye—the day was now breaking—and reminded me that I had come down it one night, as I had reason for remembering, with my little servant and poor Jo, whom he called Toughey.

I wondered how he knew that.

"When you passed a man upon the road, just yonder, you know," said Mr. Bucket.

Yes, I remembered that too, very well.

"That was me," said Mr. Bucket.

Seeing my surprise, he went on, "I drove down in a gig that afternoon to look after that boy. You might have heard my wheels when you came out to look after him yourself, for I was aware of you and your little maid going up when I was walking the horse down. Making an inquiry or two about him in the town, I soon heard what company he was in and was coming among the brick-fields to look for him when I observed you bringing him home here."

"Had he committed any crime?" I asked.

"None was charged against him," said Mr. Bucket, coolly lifting off his hat, "but I suppose he wasn't over-particular. No. What I wanted him for was in connexion with keeping this very matter of Lady Dedlock quiet. He had been making his tongue more free than welcome as to a small accidental service he had been paid for by the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn; and it wouldn't do, at any sort of price, to have him playing those games. So having warned him out of London, I made an afternoon of it to warn him to keep out of it now he WAS away, and go farther from it, and maintain a bright look-out that I didn't catch him coming back again."

"Poor creature!" said I.

"Poor enough," assented Mr. Bucket, "and trouble enough, and well

enough away from London, or anywhere else. I was regularly turned on my back when I found him taken up by your establishment, I do assure you."

I asked him why. "Why, my dear?" said Mr. Bucket. "Naturally there was no end to his tongue then. He might as well have been born with a yard and a half of it, and a remnant over."

Although I remember this conversation now, my head was in confusion at the time, and my power of attention hardly did more than enable me to understand that he entered into these particulars to divert me. With the same kind intention, manifestly, he often spoke to me of indifferent things, while his face was busy with the one object that we had in view. He still pursued this subject as we turned in at the garden-gate.

"Ah!" said Mr. Bucket. "Here we are, and a nice retired place it is. Puts a man in mind of the country house in the Woodpecker-tapping, that was known by the smoke which so gracefully curled. They're early with the kitchen fire, and that denotes good servants. But what you've always got to be careful of with servants is who comes to see 'em; you never know what they're up to if you don't know that. And another thing, my dear. Whenever you find a young man behind the kitchen-door, you give that young man in charge on suspicion of being secreted in a dwelling-house with an unlawful purpose."

We were now in front of the house; he looked attentively and closely at the gravel for footprints before he raised his eyes to the windows.

"Do you generally put that elderly young gentleman in the same room when he's on a visit here, Miss Summerson?" he inquired, glancing at Mr. Skimpole's usual chamber.

"You know Mr. Skimpole!" said I.

"What do you call him again?" returned Mr. Bucket, bending down his ear. "Skimpole, is it? I've often wondered what his name might be. Skimpole. Not John, I should say, nor yet Jacob?"

"Harold," I told him.

"Harold. Yes. He's a queer bird is Harold," said Mr. Bucket, eyeing me with great expression.

"He is a singular character," said I.

"No idea of money," observed Mr. Bucket. "He takes it, though!"

I involuntarily returned for answer that I perceived Mr. Bucket knew him.

“Why, now I’ll tell you, Miss Summerson,” he replied. “Your mind will be all the better for not running on one point too continually, and I’ll tell you for a change. It was him as pointed out to me where Toughey was. I made up my mind that night to come to the door and ask for Toughey, if that was all; but willing to try a move or so first, if any such was on the board, I just pitched up a morsel of gravel at that window where I saw a shadow. As soon as Harold opens it and I have had a look at him, thinks I, you’re the man for me. So I smoothed him down a bit about not wanting to disturb the family after they was gone to bed and about its being a thing to be regretted that charitable young ladies should harbour vagrants; and then, when I pretty well understood his ways, I said I should consider a fypunnote well bestowed if I could relieve the premises of Toughey without causing any noise or trouble. Then says he, lifting up his eyebrows in the gayest way, ‘It’s no use mentioning a fypunnote to me, my friend, because I’m a mere child in such matters and have no idea of money.’ Of course I understood what his taking it so easy meant; and being now quite sure he was the man for me, I wrapped the note round a little stone and threw it up to him. Well! He laughs and beams, and looks as innocent as you like, and says, ‘But I don’t know the value of these things. What am I to DO with this?’ ‘Spend it, sir,’ says I. ‘But I shall be taken in,’ he says, ‘they won’t give me the right change, I shall lose it, it’s no use to me.’ Lord, you never saw such a face as he carried it with! Of course he told me where to find Toughey, and I found him.”

I regarded this as very treacherous on the part of Mr. Skimpole towards my guardian and as passing the usual bounds of his childish innocence.

“Bounds, my dear?” returned Mr. Bucket. “Bounds? Now, Miss Summerson, I’ll give you a piece of advice that your husband will find useful when you are happily married and have got a family about you. Whenever a person says to you that they are as innocent as can be in all concerning money, look well after your own money, for they are dead certain to collar it if they can. Whenever a person proclaims to you ‘In worldly matters I’m a child,’ you consider that that person is only a-crying off from being held accountable and that you have got that person’s number, and it’s Number One. Now, I am not a poetical man myself, except in a vocal way when it goes round a company, but I’m a practical one, and that’s my experience. So’s this rule. Fast and loose in one thing, fast and loose in

everything. I never knew it fail. No more will you. Nor no one. With which caution to the unwary, my dear, I take the liberty of pulling this here bell, and so go back to our business."

I believe it had not been for a moment out of his mind, any more than it had been out of my mind, or out of his face. The whole household were amazed to see me, without any notice, at that time in the morning, and so accompanied; and their surprise was not diminished by my inquiries. No one, however, had been there. It could not be doubted that this was the truth.

"Then, Miss Summerson," said my companion, "we can't be too soon at the cottage where those brickmakers are to be found. Most inquiries there I leave to you, if you'll be so good as to make 'em. The naturalest way is the best way, and the naturalest way is your own way."

We set off again immediately. On arriving at the cottage, we found it shut up and apparently deserted, but one of the neighbours who knew me and who came out when I was trying to make some one hear informed me that the two women and their husbands now lived together in another house, made of loose rough bricks, which stood on the margin of the piece of ground where the kilns were and where the long rows of bricks were drying. We lost no time in repairing to this place, which was within a few hundred yards; and as the door stood ajar, I pushed it open.

There were only three of them sitting at breakfast, the child lying asleep on a bed in the corner. It was Jenny, the mother of the dead child, who was absent. The other woman rose on seeing me; and the men, though they were, as usual, sulky and silent, each gave me a morose nod of recognition. A look passed between them when Mr. Bucket followed me in, and I was surprised to see that the woman evidently knew him.

I had asked leave to enter of course. Liz (the only name by which I knew her) rose to give me her own chair, but I sat down on a stool near the fire, and Mr. Bucket took a corner of the bedstead. Now that I had to speak and was among people with whom I was not familiar, I became conscious of being hurried and giddy. It was very difficult to begin, and I could not help bursting into tears.

"Liz," said I, "I have come a long way in the night and through the snow to inquire after a lady—"

"Who has been here, you know," Mr. Bucket struck in, addressing the

whole group with a composed propitiatory face; “that’s the lady the young lady means. The lady that was here last night, you know.”

“And who told YOU as there was anybody here?” inquired Jenny’s husband, who had made a surly stop in his eating to listen and now measured him with his eye.

“A person of the name of Michael Jackson, with a blue welveteen waistcoat with a double row of mother of pearl buttons,” Mr. Bucket immediately answered.

“He had as good mind his own business, whoever he is,” growled the man.

“He’s out of employment, I believe,” said Mr. Bucket apologetically for Michael Jackson, “and so gets talking.”

The woman had not resumed her chair, but stood faltering with her hand upon its broken back, looking at me. I thought she would have spoken to me privately if she had dared. She was still in this attitude of uncertainty when her husband, who was eating with a lump of bread and fat in one hand and his clasp-knife in the other, struck the handle of his knife violently on the table and told her with an oath to mind HER own business at any rate and sit down.

“I should like to have seen Jenny very much,” said I, “for I am sure she would have told me all she could about this lady, whom I am very anxious indeed—you cannot think how anxious—to overtake. Will Jenny be here soon? Where is she?”

The woman had a great desire to answer, but the man, with another oath, openly kicked at her foot with his heavy boot. He left it to Jenny’s husband to say what he chose, and after a dogged silence the latter turned his shaggy head towards me.

“I’m not partial to gentlefolks coming into my place, as you’ve heerd me say afore now, I think, miss. I let their places be, and it’s curious they can’t let my place be. There’d be a pretty shine made if I was to go a-wisitin THEM, I think. Howsoever, I don’t so much complain of you as of some others, and I’m agreeable to make you a civil answer, though I give notice that I’m not a-going to be drawed like a badger. Will Jenny be here soon? No she won’t. Where is she? She’s gone up to Lunnun.”

“Did she go last night?” I asked.

“Did she go last night? Ah! She went last night,” he answered with a

sulky jerk of his head.

“But was she here when the lady came? And what did the lady say to her? And where is the lady gone? I beg and pray you to be so kind as to tell me,” said I, “for I am in great distress to know.”

“If my master would let me speak, and not say a word of harm—” the woman timidly began.

“Your master,” said her husband, muttering an imprecation with slow emphasis, “will break your neck if you meddle with wot don’t concern you.”

After another silence, the husband of the absent woman, turning to me again, answered me with his usual grumbling unwillingness.

“Wos Jenny here when the lady come? Yes, she wos here when the lady come. Wot did the lady say to her? Well, I’ll tell you wot the lady said to her. She said, ‘You remember me as come one time to talk to you about the young lady as had been a-wisiting of you? You remember me as give you somethink handsome for a handkercher wot she had left?’ Ah, she remembered. So we all did. Well, then, wos that young lady up at the house now? No, she warn’t up at the house now. Well, then, lookee here. The lady was upon a journey all alone, strange as we might think it, and could she rest herself where you’re a setten for a hour or so. Yes she could, and so she did. Then she went—it might be at twenty minutes past eleven, and it might be at twenty minutes past twelve; we ain’t got no watches here to know the time by, nor yet clocks. Where did she go? I don’t know where she go’d. She went one way, and Jenny went another; one went right to Lunnun, and t’other went right from it. That’s all about it. Ask this man. He heerd it all, and see it all. He knows.”

The other man repeated, “That’s all about it.”

“Was the lady crying?” I inquired.

“Devil a bit,” returned the first man. “Her shoes was the worse, and her clothes was the worse, but she warn’t—not as I see.”

The woman sat with her arms crossed and her eyes upon the ground. Her husband had turned his seat a little so as to face her and kept his hammer-like hand upon the table as if it were in readiness to execute his threat if she disobeyed him.

“I hope you will not object to my asking your wife,” said I, “how the lady looked.”

“Come, then!” he gruffly cried to her. “You hear what she says. Cut it short and tell her.”

“Bad,” replied the woman. “Pale and exhausted. Very bad.”

“Did she speak much?”

“Not much, but her voice was hoarse.”

She answered, looking all the while at her husband for leave.

“Was she faint?” said I. “Did she eat or drink here?”

“Go on!” said the husband in answer to her look. “Tell her and cut it short.”

“She had a little water, miss, and Jenny fetched her some bread and tea. But she hardly touched it.”

“And when she went from here,” I was proceeding, when Jenny’s husband impatiently took me up.

“When she went from here, she went right away nor’ard by the high road. Ask on the road if you doubt me, and see if it warn’t so. Now, there’s the end. That’s all about it.”

I glanced at my companion, and finding that he had already risen and was ready to depart, thanked them for what they had told me, and took my leave. The woman looked full at Mr. Bucket as he went out, and he looked full at her.

“Now, Miss Summerson,” he said to me as we walked quickly away. “They’ve got her ladyship’s watch among ’em. That’s a positive fact.”

“You saw it?” I exclaimed.

“Just as good as saw it,” he returned. “Else why should he talk about his ‘twenty minutes past’ and about his having no watch to tell the time by? Twenty minutes! He don’t usually cut his time so fine as that. If he comes to half-hours, it’s as much as HE does. Now, you see, either her ladyship gave him that watch or he took it. I think she gave it him. Now, what should she give it him for? What should she give it him for?”

He repeated this question to himself several times as we hurried on, appearing to balance between a variety of answers that arose in his mind.

“If time could be spared,” said Mr. Bucket, “which is the only thing that can’t be spared in this case, I might get it out of that woman; but it’s too doubtful a chance to trust to under present circumstances. They are up to keeping a close eye upon her, and any fool knows that a poor creetur like her, beaten and kicked and scarred and bruised from head to foot, will stand

by the husband that ill uses her through thick and thin. There's something kept back. It's a pity but what we had seen the other woman."

I regretted it exceedingly, for she was very grateful, and I felt sure would have resisted no entreaty of mine.

"It's possible, Miss Summerson," said Mr. Bucket, pondering on it, "that her ladyship sent her up to London with some word for you, and it's possible that her husband got the watch to let her go. It don't come out altogether so plain as to please me, but it's on the cards. Now, I don't take kindly to laying out the money of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, on these roughs, and I don't see my way to the usefulness of it at present. No! So far our road, Miss Summerson, is for'ard—straight ahead—and keeping everything quiet!"

We called at home once more that I might send a hasty note to my guardian, and then we hurried back to where we had left the carriage. The horses were brought out as soon as we were seen coming, and we were on the road again in a few minutes.

It had set in snowing at daybreak, and it now snowed hard. The air was so thick with the darkness of the day and the density of the fall that we could see but a very little way in any direction. Although it was extremely cold, the snow was but partially frozen, and it churned—with a sound as if it were a beach of small shells—under the hoofs of the horses into mire and water. They sometimes slipped and floundered for a mile together, and we were obliged to come to a standstill to rest them. One horse fell three times in this first stage, and trembled so and was so shaken that the driver had to dismount from his saddle and lead him at last.

I could eat nothing and could not sleep, and I grew so nervous under those delays and the slow pace at which we travelled that I had an unreasonable desire upon me to get out and walk. Yielding to my companion's better sense, however, I remained where I was. All this time, kept fresh by a certain enjoyment of the work in which he was engaged, he was up and down at every house we came to, addressing people whom he had never beheld before as old acquaintances, running in to warm himself at every fire he saw, talking and drinking and shaking hands at every bar and tap, friendly with every waggoner, wheelwright, blacksmith, and toll-taker, yet never seeming to lose time, and always mounting to the box again with his watchful, steady face and his business-like "Get on, my lad!"

When we were changing horses the next time, he came from the stable-yard, with the wet snow encrusted upon him and dropping off him—plashing and crashing through it to his wet knees as he had been doing frequently since we left Saint Albans—and spoke to me at the carriage side.

"Keep up your spirits. It's certainly true that she came on here, Miss Summerson. There's not a doubt of the dress by this time, and the dress has been seen here."

"Still on foot?" said I.

"Still on foot. I think the gentleman you mentioned must be the point she's aiming at, and yet I don't like his living down in her own part of the country neither."

"I know so little," said I. "There may be some one else nearer here, of whom I never heard."

"That's true. But whatever you do, don't you fall a-crying, my dear; and don't you worry yourself no more than you can help. Get on, my lad!"

The sleet fell all that day unceasingly, a thick mist came on early, and it never rose or lightened for a moment. Such roads I had never seen. I sometimes feared we had missed the way and got into the ploughed grounds or the marshes. If I ever thought of the time I had been out, it presented itself as an indefinite period of great duration, and I seemed, in a strange way, never to have been free from the anxiety under which I then laboured.

As we advanced, I began to feel misgivings that my companion lost confidence. He was the same as before with all the roadside people, but he looked graver when he sat by himself on the box. I saw his finger uneasily going across and across his mouth during the whole of one long weary stage. I overheard that he began to ask the drivers of coaches and other vehicles coming towards us what passengers they had seen in other coaches and vehicles that were in advance. Their replies did not encourage him. He always gave me a reassuring beck of his finger and lift of his eyelid as he got upon the box again, but he seemed perplexed now when he said, "Get on, my lad!"

At last, when we were changing, he told me that he had lost the track of the dress so long that he began to be surprised. It was nothing, he said, to lose such a track for one while, and to take it up for another while, and so on; but it had disappeared here in an unaccountable manner, and we had not come upon it since. This corroborated the apprehensions I had formed,

when he began to look at direction-posts, and to leave the carriage at cross roads for a quarter of an hour at a time while he explored them. But I was not to be down-hearted, he told me, for it was as likely as not that the next stage might set us right again.

The next stage, however, ended as that one ended; we had no new clue. There was a spacious inn here, solitary, but a comfortable substantial building, and as we drove in under a large gateway before I knew it, where a landlady and her pretty daughters came to the carriage-door, entreating me to alight and refresh myself while the horses were making ready, I thought it would be uncharitable to refuse. They took me upstairs to a warm room and left me there.

It was at the corner of the house, I remember, looking two ways. On one side to a stable-yard open to a by-road, where the ostlers were unharnessing the splashed and tired horses from the muddy carriage, and beyond that to the by-road itself, across which the sign was heavily swinging; on the other side to a wood of dark pine-trees. Their branches were encumbered with snow, and it silently dropped off in wet heaps while I stood at the window. Night was setting in, and its bleakness was enhanced by the contrast of the pictured fire glowing and gleaming in the window-pane. As I looked among the stems of the trees and followed the discoloured marks in the snow where the thaw was sinking into it and undermining it, I thought of the motherly face brightly set off by daughters that had just now welcomed me and of MY mother lying down in such a wood to die.

I was frightened when I found them all about me, but I remembered that before I fainted I tried very hard not to do it; and that was some little comfort. They cushioned me up on a large sofa by the fire, and then the comely landlady told me that I must travel no further to-night, but must go to bed. But this put me into such a tremble lest they should detain me there that she soon recalled her words and compromised for a rest of half an hour.

A good endearing creature she was. She and her three fair girls, all so busy about me. I was to take hot soup and broiled fowl, while Mr. Bucket dried himself and dined elsewhere; but I could not do it when a snug round table was presently spread by the fireside, though I was very unwilling to disappoint them. However, I could take some toast and some hot negus, and as I really enjoyed that refreshment, it made some recompense.

Punctual to the time, at the half-hour’s end the carriage came rumbling

under the gateway, and they took me down, warmed, refreshed, comforted by kindness, and safe (I assured them) not to faint any more. After I had got in and had taken a grateful leave of them all, the youngest daughter—a blooming girl of nineteen, who was to be the first married, they had told me—got upon the carriage step, reached in, and kissed me. I have never seen her, from that hour, but I think of her to this hour as my friend.

The transparent windows with the fire and light, looking so bright and warm from the cold darkness out of doors, were soon gone, and again we were crushing and churning the loose snow. We went on with toil enough, but the dismal roads were not much worse than they had been, and the stage was only nine miles. My companion smoking on the box—I had thought at the last inn of begging him to do so when I saw him standing at a great fire in a comfortable cloud of tobacco—was as vigilant as ever and as quickly down and up again when we came to any human abode or any human creature. He had lighted his little dark lantern, which seemed to be a favourite with him, for we had lamps to the carriage; and every now and then he turned it upon me to see that I was doing well. There was a folding-window to the carriage-head, but I never closed it, for it seemed like shutting out hope.

We came to the end of the stage, and still the lost trace was not recovered. I looked at him anxiously when we stopped to change, but I knew by his yet graver face as he stood watching the ostlers that he had heard nothing. Almost in an instant afterwards, as I leaned back in my seat, he looked in, with his lighted lantern in his hand, an excited and quite different man.

“What is it?” said I, starting. “Is she here?”

“No, no. Don’t deceive yourself, my dear. Nobody’s here. But I’ve got it!”

The crystallized snow was in his eyelashes, in his hair, lying in ridges on his dress. He had to shake it from his face and get his breath before he spoke to me.

“Now, Miss Summerson,” said he, beating his finger on the apron, “don’t you be disappointed at what I’m a-going to do. You know me. I’m Inspector Bucket, and you can trust me. We’ve come a long way; never mind. Four horses out there for the next stage up! Quick!”

There was a commotion in the yard, and a man came running out of the

stables to know if he meant up or down.

"Up, I tell you! Up! Ain't it English? Up!"

"Up?" said I, astonished. "To London! Are we going back?"

"Miss Summerson," he answered, "back. Straight back as a die. You know me. Don't be afraid. I'll follow the other, by G——"

"The other?" I repeated. "Who?"

"You called her Jenny, didn't you? I'll follow her. Bring those two pair out here for a crown a man. Wake up, some of you!"

"You will not desert this lady we are in search of; you will not abandon her on such a night and in such a state of mind as I know her to be in!" said I, in an agony, and grasping his hand.

"You are right, my dear, I won't. But I'll follow the other. Look alive here with them horses. Send a man for'ard in the saddle to the next stage, and let him send another for'ard again, and order four on, up, right through. My darling, don't you be afraid!"

These orders and the way in which he ran about the yard urging them caused a general excitement that was scarcely less bewildering to me than the sudden change. But in the height of the confusion, a mounted man galloped away to order the relays, and our horses were put to with great speed.

"My dear," said Mr. Bucket, jumping to his seat and looking in again, "—you'll excuse me if I'm too familiar—don't you fret and worry yourself no more than you can help. I say nothing else at present; but you know me, my dear; now, don't you?"

I endeavoured to say that I knew he was far more capable than I of deciding what we ought to do, but was he sure that this was right? Could I not go forward by myself in search of—I grasped his hand again in my distress and whispered it to him—of my own mother.

"My dear," he answered, "I know, I know, and would I put you wrong, do you think? Inspector Bucket. Now you know me, don't you?"

What could I say but yes!

"Then you keep up as good a heart as you can, and you rely upon me for standing by you, no less than by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. Now, are you right there?"

"All right, sir!"

"Off she goes, then. And get on, my lads!"

We were again upon the melancholy road by which we had come, tearing up the miry sleet and thawing snow as if they were torn up by a waterwheel.

CHAPTER LVIII

A Wintry Day and Night

STILL IMPASSIVE, AS BEHOVES its breeding, the Dedlock town house carries itself as usual towards the street of dismal grandeur. There are powdered heads from time to time in the little windows of the hall, looking out at the untaxed powder falling all day from the sky; and in the same conservatory there is peach blossom turning itself exotically to the great hall fire from the nipping weather out of doors. It is given out that my Lady has gone down into Lincolnshire, but is expected to return presently.

Rumour, busy overmuch, however, will not go down into Lincolnshire. It persists in flitting and chattering about town. It knows that that poor unfortunate man, Sir Leicester, has been sadly used. It hears, my dear child, all sorts of shocking things. It makes the world of five miles round quite merry. Not to know that there is something wrong at the Dedlocks' is to augur yourself unknown. One of the peachy-cheeked charmers with the skeleton throats is already apprised of all the principal circumstances that will come out before the Lords on Sir Leicester's application for a bill of divorce.

At Blaze and Sparkle's the jewellers and at Sheen and Gloss's the mercers, it is and will be for several hours the topic of the age, the feature of the century. The patronesses of those establishments, albeit so loftily inscrutable, being as nicely weighed and measured there as any other article of the stock-in-trade, are perfectly understood in this new fashion by the rawest hand behind the counter. "Our people, Mr. Jones," said Blaze and Sparkle to the hand in question on engaging him, "our people, sir, are sheep—mere sheep. Where two or three marked ones go, all the rest follow. Keep those two or three in your eye, Mr. Jones, and you have the flock." So, likewise, Sheen and Gloss to THEIR Jones, in reference to knowing where to have the fashionable people and how to bring what they (Sheen and Gloss) choose into fashion. On similar unerring principles, Mr. Sladdery the librarian, and indeed the great farmer of gorgeous sheep, admits this very

day, “Why yes, sir, there certainly ARE reports concerning Lady Dedlock, very current indeed among my high connexion, sir. You see, my high connexion must talk about something, sir; and it’s only to get a subject into vogue with one or two ladies I could name to make it go down with the whole. Just what I should have done with those ladies, sir, in the case of any novelty you had left to me to bring in, they have done of themselves in this case through knowing Lady Dedlock and being perhaps a little innocently jealous of her too, sir. You’ll find, sir, that this topic will be very popular among my high connexion. If it had been a speculation, sir, it would have brought money. And when I say so, you may trust to my being right, sir, for I have made it my business to study my high connexion and to be able to wind it up like a clock, sir.”

Thus rumour thrives in the capital, and will not go down into Lincolnshire. By half-past five, post meridian, Horse Guards’ time, it has even elicited a new remark from the Honourable Mr. Stables, which bids fair to outshine the old one, on which he has so long rested his colloquial reputation. This sparkling sally is to the effect that although he always knew she was the best-groomed woman in the stud, he had no idea she was a bolter. It is immensely received in turf-circles.

At feasts and festivals also, in firmaments she has often graced, and among constellations she outshone but yesterday, she is still the prevalent subject. What is it? Who is it? When was it? Where was it? How was it? She is discussed by her dear friends with all the genteelest slang in vogue, with the last new word, the last new manner, the last new drawl, and the perfection of polite indifference. A remarkable feature of the theme is that it is found to be so inspiring that several people come out upon it who never came out before—positively say things! William Buffy carries one of these smartnesses from the place where he dines down to the House, where the Whip for his party hands it about with his snuff-box to keep men together who want to be off, with such effect that the Speaker (who has had it privately insinuated into his own ear under the corner of his wig) cries, “Order at the bar!” three times without making an impression.

And not the least amazing circumstance connected with her being vaguely the town talk is that people hovering on the confines of Mr. Sladdery’s high connexion, people who know nothing and ever did know nothing about her, think it essential to their reputation to pretend that she is

their topic too, and to retail her at second-hand with the last new word and the last new manner, and the last new drawl, and the last new polite indifference, and all the rest of it, all at second-hand but considered equal to new in inferior systems and to fainter stars. If there be any man of letters, art, or science among these little dealers, how noble in him to support the feeble sisters on such majestic crutches!

So goes the wintry day outside the Dedlock mansion. How within it?

Sir Leicester, lying in his bed, can speak a little, though with difficulty and indistinctness. He is enjoined to silence and to rest, and they have given him some opiate to lull his pain, for his old enemy is very hard with him. He is never asleep, though sometimes he seems to fall into a dull waking doze. He caused his bedstead to be moved out nearer to the window when he heard it was such inclement weather, and his head to be so adjusted that he could see the driving snow and sleet. He watches it as it falls, throughout the whole wintry day.

Upon the least noise in the house, which is kept hushed, his hand is at the pencil. The old housekeeper, sitting by him, knows what he would write and whispers, “No, he has not come back yet, Sir Leicester. It was late last night when he went. He has been but a little time gone yet.”

He withdraws his hand and falls to looking at the sleet and snow again until they seem, by being long looked at, to fall so thick and fast that he is obliged to close his eyes for a minute on the giddy whirl of white flakes and icy blots.

He began to look at them as soon as it was light. The day is not yet far spent when he conceives it to be necessary that her rooms should be prepared for her. It is very cold and wet. Let there be good fires. Let them know that she is expected. Please see to it yourself. He writes to this purpose on his slate, and Mrs. Rouncewell with a heavy heart obeys.

“For I dread, George,” the old lady says to her son, who waits below to keep her company when she has a little leisure, “I dread, my dear, that my Lady will never more set foot within these walls.”

“That’s a bad presentiment, mother.”

“Nor yet within the walls of Chesney Wold, my dear.”

“That’s worse. But why, mother?”

“When I saw my Lady yesterday, George, she looked to me—and I may say at me too—as if the step on the Ghost’s Walk had almost walked her

down.”

“Come, come! You alarm yourself with old-story fears, mother.”

“No I don’t, my dear. No I don’t. It’s going on for sixty year that I have been in this family, and I never had any fears for it before. But it’s breaking up, my dear; the great old Dedlock family is breaking up.”

“I hope not, mother.”

“I am thankful I have lived long enough to be with Sir Leicester in this illness and trouble, for I know I am not too old nor too useless to be a welcomer sight to him than anybody else in my place would be. But the step on the Ghost’s Walk will walk my Lady down, George; it has been many a day behind her, and now it will pass her and go on.”

“Well, mother dear, I say again, I hope not.”

“Ah, so do I, George,” the old lady returns, shaking her head and parting her folded hands. “But if my fears come true, and he has to know it, who will tell him!”

“Are these her rooms?”

“These are my Lady’s rooms, just as she left them.”

“Why, now,” says the trooper, glancing round him and speaking in a lower voice, “I begin to understand how you come to think as you do think, mother. Rooms get an awful look about them when they are fitted up, like these, for one person you are used to see in them, and that person is away under any shadow, let alone being God knows where.”

He is not far out. As all partings foreshadow the great final one, so, empty rooms, bereft of a familiar presence, mournfully whisper what your room and what mine must one day be. My Lady’s state has a hollow look, thus gloomy and abandoned; and in the inner apartment, where Mr. Bucket last night made his secret perquisition, the traces of her dresses and her ornaments, even the mirrors accustomed to reflect them when they were a portion of herself, have a desolate and vacant air. Dark and cold as the wintry day is, it is darker and colder in these deserted chambers than in many a hut that will barely exclude the weather; and though the servants heap fires in the grates and set the couches and the chairs within the warm glass screens that let their ruddy light shoot through to the furthest corners, there is a heavy cloud upon the rooms which no light will dispel.

The old housekeeper and her son remain until the preparations are complete, and then she returns upstairs. Volumnia has taken Mrs.

Rouncewell's place in the meantime, though pearl necklaces and rouge pots, however calculated to embellish Bath, are but indifferent comforts to the invalid under present circumstances. Volumnia, not being supposed to know (and indeed not knowing) what is the matter, has found it a ticklish task to offer appropriate observations and consequently has supplied their place with distracting smoothings of the bed-linen, elaborate locomotion on tiptoe, vigilant peeping at her kinsman's eyes, and one exasperating whisper to herself of, "He is asleep." In disproof of which superfluous remark Sir Leicester has indignantly written on the slate, "I am not."

Yielding, therefore, the chair at the bedside to the quaint old housekeeper, Volumnia sits at a table a little removed, sympathetically sighing. Sir Leicester watches the sleet and snow and listens for the returning steps that he expects. In the ears of his old servant, looking as if she had stepped out of an old picture-frame to attend a summoned Dedlock to another world, the silence is fraught with echoes of her own words, "Who will tell him!"

He has been under his valet's hands this morning to be made presentable and is as well got up as the circumstances will allow. He is propped with pillows, his grey hair is brushed in its usual manner, his linen is arranged to a nicety, and he is wrapped in a responsible dressing-gown. His eye-glass and his watch are ready to his hand. It is necessary—less to his own dignity now perhaps than for her sake—that he should be seen as little disturbed and as much himself as may be. Women will talk, and Volumnia, though a Dedlock, is no exceptional case. He keeps her here, there is little doubt, to prevent her talking somewhere else. He is very ill, but he makes his present stand against distress of mind and body most courageously.

The fair Volumnia, being one of those sprightly girls who cannot long continue silent without imminent peril of seizure by the dragon Boredom, soon indicates the approach of that monster with a series of undisguisable yawns. Finding it impossible to suppress those yawns by any other process than conversation, she compliments Mrs. Rouncewell on her son, declaring that he positively is one of the finest figures she ever saw and as soldierly a looking person, she should think, as what's his name, her favourite Life Guardsman—the man she dotes on, the dearest of creatures—who was killed at Waterloo.

Sir Leicester hears this tribute with so much surprise and stares about

him in such a confused way that Mrs. Rouncewell feels it necessary to explain.

“Miss Dedlock don’t speak of my eldest son, Sir Leicester, but my youngest. I have found him. He has come home.”

Sir Leicester breaks silence with a harsh cry. “George? Your son George come home, Mrs. Rouncewell?”

The old housekeeper wipes her eyes. “Thank God. Yes, Sir Leicester.”

Does this discovery of some one lost, this return of some one so long gone, come upon him as a strong confirmation of his hopes? Does he think, “Shall I not, with the aid I have, recall her safely after this, there being fewer hours in her case than there are years in his?”

It is of no use entreating him; he is determined to speak now, and he does. In a thick crowd of sounds, but still intelligibly enough to be understood.

“Why did you not tell me, Mrs. Rouncewell?”

“It happened only yesterday, Sir Leicester, and I doubted your being well enough to be talked to of such things.”

Besides, the giddy Volumnia now remembers with her little scream that nobody was to have known of his being Mrs. Rouncewell’s son and that she was not to have told. But Mrs. Rouncewell protests, with warmth enough to swell the stomacher, that of course she would have told Sir Leicester as soon as he got better.

“Where is your son George, Mrs. Rouncewell?” asks Sir Leicester,

Mrs. Rouncewell, not a little alarmed by his disregard of the doctor’s injunctions, replies, in London.

“Where in London?”

Mrs. Rouncewell is constrained to admit that he is in the house.

“Bring him here to my room. Bring him directly.”

The old lady can do nothing but go in search of him. Sir Leicester, with such power of movement as he has, arranges himself a little to receive him. When he has done so, he looks out again at the falling sleet and snow and listens again for the returning steps. A quantity of straw has been tumbled down in the street to deaden the noises there, and she might be driven to the door perhaps without his hearing wheels.

He is lying thus, apparently forgetful of his newer and minor surprise, when the housekeeper returns, accompanied by her trooper son. Mr. George

approaches softly to the bedside, makes his bow, squares his chest, and stands, with his face flushed, very heartily ashamed of himself.

“Good heaven, and it is really George Rouncewell!” exclaims Sir Leicester. “Do you remember me, George?”

The trooper needs to look at him and to separate this sound from that sound before he knows what he has said, but doing this and being a little helped by his mother, he replies, “I must have a very bad memory, indeed, Sir Leicester, if I failed to remember you.”

“When I look at you, George Rouncewell,” Sir Leicester observes with difficulty, “I see something of a boy at Chesney Wold—I remember well—very well.”

He looks at the trooper until tears come into his eyes, and then he looks at the sleet and snow again.

“I ask your pardon, Sir Leicester,” says the trooper, “but would you accept of my arms to raise you up? You would lie easier, Sir Leicester, if you would allow me to move you.”

“If you please, George Rouncewell; if you will be so good.”

The trooper takes him in his arms like a child, lightly raises him, and turns him with his face more towards the window. “Thank you. You have your mother’s gentleness,” returns Sir Leicester, “and your own strength. Thank you.”

He signs to him with his hand not to go away. George quietly remains at the bedside, waiting to be spoken to.

“Why did you wish for secrecy?” It takes Sir Leicester some time to ask this.

“Truly I am not much to boast of, Sir Leicester, and I—I should still, Sir Leicester, if you was not so indisposed—which I hope you will not be long—I should still hope for the favour of being allowed to remain unknown in general. That involves explanations not very hard to be guessed at, not very well timed here, and not very creditable to myself. However opinions may differ on a variety of subjects, I should think it would be universally agreed, Sir Leicester, that I am not much to boast of.”

“You have been a soldier,” observes Sir Leicester, “and a faithful one.”

George makes his military bow. “As far as that goes, Sir Leicester, I have done my duty under discipline, and it was the least I could do.”

“You find me,” says Sir Leicester, whose eyes are much attracted

towards him, “far from well, George Rouncewell.”

“I am very sorry both to hear it and to see it, Sir Leicester.”

“I am sure you are. No. In addition to my older malady, I have had a sudden and bad attack. Something that deadens,” making an endeavour to pass one hand down one side, “and confuses,” touching his lips.

George, with a look of assent and sympathy, makes another bow. The different times when they were both young men (the trooper much the younger of the two) and looked at one another down at Chesney Wold arise before them both and soften both.

Sir Leicester, evidently with a great determination to say, in his own manner, something that is on his mind before relapsing into silence, tries to raise himself among his pillows a little more. George, observant of the action, takes him in his arms again and places him as he desires to be. “Thank you, George. You are another self to me. You have often carried my spare gun at Chesney Wold, George. You are familiar to me in these strange circumstances, very familiar.” He has put Sir Leicester’s sounder arm over his shoulder in lifting him up, and Sir Leicester is slow in drawing it away again as he says these words.

“I was about to add,” he presently goes on, “I was about to add, respecting this attack, that it was unfortunately simultaneous with a slight misunderstanding between my Lady and myself. I do not mean that there was any difference between us (for there has been none), but that there was a misunderstanding of certain circumstances important only to ourselves, which deprives me, for a little while, of my Lady’s society. She has found it necessary to make a journey—I trust will shortly return. Volumnia, do I make myself intelligible? The words are not quite under my command in the manner of pronouncing them.”

Volumnia understands him perfectly, and in truth he delivers himself with far greater plainness than could have been supposed possible a minute ago. The effort by which he does so is written in the anxious and labouring expression of his face. Nothing but the strength of his purpose enables him to make it.

“Therefore, Volumnia, I desire to say in your presence—and in the presence of my old retainer and friend, Mrs. Rouncewell, whose truth and fidelity no one can question, and in the presence of her son George, who comes back like a familiar recollection of my youth in the home of my

ancestors at Chesney Wold—in case I should relapse, in case I should not recover, in case I should lose both my speech and the power of writing, though I hope for better things—”

The old housekeeper weeping silently; Volumnia in the greatest agitation, with the freshest bloom on her cheeks; the trooper with his arms folded and his head a little bent, respectfully attentive.

“Therefore I desire to say, and to call you all to witness—beginning, Volumnia, with yourself, most solemnly—that I am on unaltered terms with Lady Dedlock. That I assert no cause whatever of complaint against her. That I have ever had the strongest affection for her, and that I retain it undiminished. Say this to herself, and to every one. If you ever say less than this, you will be guilty of deliberate falsehood to me.”

Volumnia tremblingly protests that she will observe his injunctions to the letter.

“My Lady is too high in position, too handsome, too accomplished, too superior in most respects to the best of those by whom she is surrounded, not to have her enemies and traducers, I dare say. Let it be known to them, as I make it known to you, that being of sound mind, memory, and understanding, I revoke no disposition I have made in her favour. I abridge nothing I have ever bestowed upon her. I am on unaltered terms with her, and I recall—having the full power to do it if I were so disposed, as you see—no act I have done for her advantage and happiness.”

His formal array of words might have at any other time, as it has often had, something ludicrous in it, but at this time it is serious and affecting. His noble earnestness, his fidelity, his gallant shielding of her, his generous conquest of his own wrong and his own pride for her sake, are simply honourable, manly, and true. Nothing less worthy can be seen through the lustre of such qualities in the commonest mechanic, nothing less worthy can be seen in the best-born gentleman. In such a light both aspire alike, both rise alike, both children of the dust shine equally.

Overpowered by his exertions, he lays his head back on his pillows and closes his eyes for not more than a minute, when he again resumes his watching of the weather and his attention to the muffled sounds. In the rendering of those little services, and in the manner of their acceptance, the trooper has become installed as necessary to him. Nothing has been said, but it is quite understood. He falls a step or two backward to be out of sight

and mounts guard a little behind his mother's chair.

The day is now beginning to decline. The mist and the sleet into which the snow has all resolved itself are darker, and the blaze begins to tell more vividly upon the room walls and furniture. The gloom augments; the bright gas springs up in the streets; and the pertinacious oil lamps which yet hold their ground there, with their source of life half frozen and half thawed, twinkle gaspingly like fiery fish out of water—as they are. The world, which has been rumbling over the straw and pulling at the bell, "to inquire," begins to go home, begins to dress, to dine, to discuss its dear friend with all the last new modes, as already mentioned.

Now does Sir Leicester become worse, restless, uneasy, and in great pain. Volumnia, lighting a candle (with a predestined aptitude for doing something objectionable), is bidden to put it out again, for it is not yet dark enough. Yet it is very dark too, as dark as it will be all night. By and by she tries again. No! Put it out. It is not dark enough yet.

His old housekeeper is the first to understand that he is striving to uphold the fiction with himself that it is not growing late.

"Dear Sir Leicester, my honoured master," she softly whispers, "I must, for your own good, and my duty, take the freedom of begging and praying that you will not lie here in the lone darkness watching and waiting and dragging through the time. Let me draw the curtains, and light the candles, and make things more comfortable about you. The church-clocks will strike the hours just the same, Sir Leicester, and the night will pass away just the same. My Lady will come back, just the same."

"I know it, Mrs. Rouncewell, but I am weak—and he has been so long gone."

"Not so very long, Sir Leicester. Not twenty-four hours yet."

"But that is a long time. Oh, it is a long time!"

He says it with a groan that wrings her heart.

She knows that this is not a period for bringing the rough light upon him; she thinks his tears too sacred to be seen, even by her. Therefore she sits in the darkness for a while without a word, then gently begins to move about, now stirring the fire, now standing at the dark window looking out. Finally he tells her, with recovered self-command, "As you say, Mrs. Rouncewell, it is no worse for being confessed. It is getting late, and they are not come. Light the room!" When it is lighted and the weather shut out, it is only left

to him to listen.

But they find that however dejected and ill he is, he brightens when a quiet pretence is made of looking at the fires in her rooms and being sure that everything is ready to receive her. Poor pretence as it is, these allusions to her being expected keep up hope within him.

Midnight comes, and with it the same blank. The carriages in the streets are few, and other late sounds in that neighbourhood there are none, unless a man so very nomadically drunk as to stray into the frigid zone goes brawling and bellowing along the pavement. Upon this wintry night it is so still that listening to the intense silence is like looking at intense darkness. If any distant sound be audible in this case, it departs through the gloom like a feeble light in that, and all is heavier than before.

The corporation of servants are dismissed to bed (not unwilling to go, for they were up all last night), and only Mrs. Rouncewell and George keep watch in Sir Leicester's room. As the night lags tardily on—or rather when it seems to stop altogether, at between two and three o'clock—they find a restless craving on him to know more about the weather, now he cannot see it. Hence George, patrolling regularly every half-hour to the rooms so carefully looked after, extends his march to the hall-door, looks about him, and brings back the best report he can make of the worst of nights, the sleet still falling and even the stone footways lying ankle-deep in icy sludge.

Volumnia, in her room up a retired landing on the staircase—the second turning past the end of the carving and gilding, a cousinly room containing a fearful abortion of a portrait of Sir Leicester banished for its crimes, and commanding in the day a solemn yard planted with dried-up shrubs like antediluvian specimens of black tea—is a prey to horrors of many kinds. Not last nor least among them, possibly, is a horror of what may befall her little income in the event, as she expresses it, "of anything happening" to Sir Leicester. Anything, in this sense, meaning one thing only; and that the last thing that can happen to the consciousness of any baronet in the known world.

An effect of these horrors is that Volumnia finds she cannot go to bed in her own room or sit by the fire in her own room, but must come forth with her fair head tied up in a profusion of shawl, and her fair form enrobed in drapery, and parade the mansion like a ghost, particularly haunting the rooms, warm and luxurious, prepared for one who still does not return.

Solitude under such circumstances being not to be thought of, Volumnia is attended by her maid, who, impressed from her own bed for that purpose, extremely cold, very sleepy, and generally an injured maid as condemned by circumstances to take office with a cousin, when she had resolved to be maid to nothing less than ten thousand a year, has not a sweet expression of countenance.

The periodical visits of the trooper to these rooms, however, in the course of his patrolling is an assurance of protection and company both to mistress and maid, which renders them very acceptable in the small hours of the night. Whenever he is heard advancing, they both make some little decorative preparation to receive him; at other times they divide their watches into short scraps of oblivion and dialogues not wholly free from acerbity, as to whether Miss Dedlock, sitting with her feet upon the fender, was or was not falling into the fire when rescued (to her great displeasure) by her guardian genius the maid.

"How is Sir Leicester now, Mr. George?" inquires Volumnia, adjusting her cowl over her head.

"Why, Sir Leicester is much the same, miss. He is very low and ill, and he even wanders a little sometimes."

"Has he asked for me?" inquires Volumnia tenderly.

"Why, no, I can't say he has, miss. Not within my hearing, that is to say."

"This is a truly sad time, Mr. George."

"It is indeed, miss. Hadn't you better go to bed?"

"You had a deal better go to bed, Miss Dedlock," quoth the maid sharply.

But Volumnia answers No! No! She may be asked for, she may be wanted at a moment's notice. She never should forgive herself "if anything was to happen" and she was not on the spot. She declines to enter on the question, mooted by the maid, how the spot comes to be there, and not in her room (which is nearer to Sir Leicester's), but staunchly declares that on the spot she will remain. Volumnia further makes a merit of not having "closed an eye"—as if she had twenty or thirty—though it is hard to reconcile this statement with her having most indisputably opened two within five minutes.

But when it comes to four o'clock, and still the same blank, Volumnia's constancy begins to fail her, or rather it begins to strengthen, for she now considers that it is her duty to be ready for the morrow, when much may be

expected of her, that, in fact, howsoever anxious to remain upon the spot, it may be required of her, as an act of self-devotion, to desert the spot. So when the trooper reappears with his, “Hadn’t you better go to bed, miss?” and when the maid protests, more sharply than before, “You had a deal better go to bed, Miss Dedlock!” she meekly rises and says, “Do with me what you think best!”

Mr. George undoubtedly thinks it best to escort her on his arm to the door of her cousinly chamber, and the maid as undoubtedly thinks it best to hustle her into bed with mighty little ceremony. Accordingly, these steps are taken; and now the trooper, in his rounds, has the house to himself.

There is no improvement in the weather. From the portico, from the eaves, from the parapet, from every ledge and post and pillar, drips the thawed snow. It has crept, as if for shelter, into the lintels of the great door —under it, into the corners of the windows, into every chink and crevice of retreat, and there wastes and dies. It is falling still; upon the roof, upon the skylight, even through the skylight, and drip, drip, drip, with the regularity of the Ghost’s Walk, on the stone floor below.

The trooper, his old recollections awakened by the solitary grandeur of a great house—no novelty to him once at Chesney Wold—goes up the stairs and through the chief rooms, holding up his light at arm’s length. Thinking of his varied fortunes within the last few weeks, and of his rustic boyhood, and of the two periods of his life so strangely brought together across the wide intermediate space; thinking of the murdered man whose image is fresh in his mind; thinking of the lady who has disappeared from these very rooms and the tokens of whose recent presence are all here; thinking of the master of the house upstairs and of the foreboding, “Who will tell him!” he looks here and looks there, and reflects how he MIGHT see something now, which it would tax his boldness to walk up to, lay his hand upon, and prove to be a fancy. But it is all blank, blank as the darkness above and below, while he goes up the great staircase again, blank as the oppressive silence.

“All is still in readiness, George Rouncewell?”

“Quite orderly and right, Sir Leicester.”

“No word of any kind?”

The trooper shakes his head.

“No letter that can possibly have been overlooked?”

But he knows there is no such hope as that and lays his head down

without looking for an answer.

Very familiar to him, as he said himself some hours ago, George Rouncewell lifts him into easier positions through the long remainder of the blank wintry night, and equally familiar with his unexpressed wish, extinguishes the light and undraws the curtains at the first late break of day. The day comes like a phantom. Cold, colourless, and vague, it sends a warning streak before it of a deathlike hue, as if it cried out, “Look what I am bringing you who watch there! Who will tell him!”

CHAPTER LIX

Esther’s Narrative

IT WAS THREE O’CLOCK in the morning when the houses outside London did at last begin to exclude the country and to close us in with streets. We had made our way along roads in a far worse condition than when we had traversed them by daylight, both the fall and the thaw having lasted ever since; but the energy of my companion never slackened. It had only been, as I thought, of less assistance than the horses in getting us on, and it had often aided them. They had stopped exhausted half-way up hills, they had been driven through streams of turbulent water, they had slipped down and become entangled with the harness; but he and his little lantern had been always ready, and when the mishap was set right, I had never heard any variation in his cool, “Get on, my lads!”

The steadiness and confidence with which he had directed our journey back I could not account for. Never wavering, he never even stopped to make an inquiry until we were within a few miles of London. A very few words, here and there, were then enough for him; and thus we came, at between three and four o’clock in the morning, into Islington.

I will not dwell on the suspense and anxiety with which I reflected all this time that we were leaving my mother farther and farther behind every minute. I think I had some strong hope that he must be right and could not fail to have a satisfactory object in following this woman, but I tormented myself with questioning it and discussing it during the whole journey. What was to ensue when we found her and what could compensate us for this loss of time were questions also that I could not possibly dismiss; my mind was quite tortured by long dwelling on such reflections when we stopped.

We stopped in a high-street where there was a coach-stand. My companion paid our two drivers, who were as completely covered with splashes as if they had been dragged along the roads like the carriage itself, and giving them some brief direction where to take it, lifted me out of it and into a hackney-coach he had chosen from the rest.

“Why, my dear!” he said as he did this. “How wet you are!”

I had not been conscious of it. But the melted snow had found its way into the carriage, and I had got out two or three times when a fallen horse was plunging and had to be got up, and the wet had penetrated my dress. I assured him it was no matter, but the driver, who knew him, would not be dissuaded by me from running down the street to his stable, whence he brought an armful of clean dry straw. They shook it out and strewed it well about me, and I found it warm and comfortable.

“Now, my dear,” said Mr. Bucket, with his head in at the window after I was shut up. “We’re a-going to mark this person down. It may take a little time, but you don’t mind that. You’re pretty sure that I’ve got a motive. Ain’t you?”

I little thought what it was, little thought in how short a time I should understand it better, but I assured him that I had confidence in him.

“So you may have, my dear,” he returned. “And I tell you what! If you only repose half as much confidence in me as I repose in you after what I’ve experienced of you, that’ll do. Lord! You’re no trouble at all. I never see a young woman in any station of society—and I’ve seen many elevated ones too—conduct herself like you have conducted yourself since you was called out of your bed. You’re a pattern, you know, that’s what you are,” said Mr. Bucket warmly; “you’re a pattern.”

I told him I was very glad, as indeed I was, to have been no hindrance to him, and that I hoped I should be none now.

“My dear,” he returned, “when a young lady is as mild as she’s game, and as game as she’s mild, that’s all I ask, and more than I expect. She then becomes a queen, and that’s about what you are yourself.”

With these encouraging words—they really were encouraging to me under those lonely and anxious circumstances—he got upon the box, and we once more drove away. Where we drove I neither knew then nor have ever known since, but we appeared to seek out the narrowest and worst streets in London. Whenever I saw him directing the driver, I was prepared for our descending into a deeper complication of such streets, and we never failed to do so.

Sometimes we emerged upon a wider thoroughfare or came to a larger building than the generality, well lighted. Then we stopped at offices like those we had visited when we began our journey, and I saw him in

consultation with others. Sometimes he would get down by an archway or at a street corner and mysteriously show the light of his little lantern. This would attract similar lights from various dark quarters, like so many insects, and a fresh consultation would be held. By degrees we appeared to contract our search within narrower and easier limits. Single police-officers on duty could now tell Mr. Bucket what he wanted to know and point to him where to go. At last we stopped for a rather long conversation between him and one of these men, which I supposed to be satisfactory from his manner of nodding from time to time. When it was finished he came to me looking very busy and very attentive.

"Now, Miss Summerson," he said to me, "you won't be alarmed whatever comes off, I know. It's not necessary for me to give you any further caution than to tell you that we have marked this person down and that you may be of use to me before I know it myself. I don't like to ask such a thing, my dear, but would you walk a little way?"

Of course I got out directly and took his arm.

"It ain't so easy to keep your feet," said Mr. Bucket, "but take time."

Although I looked about me confusedly and hurriedly as we crossed the street, I thought I knew the place. "Are we in Holborn?" I asked him.

"Yes," said Mr. Bucket. "Do you know this turning?"

"It looks like Chancery Lane."

"And was christened so, my dear," said Mr. Bucket.

We turned down it, and as we went shuffling through the sleet, I heard the clocks strike half-past five. We passed on in silence and as quickly as we could with such a foot-hold, when some one coming towards us on the narrow pavement, wrapped in a cloak, stopped and stood aside to give me room. In the same moment I heard an exclamation of wonder and my own name from Mr. Woodcourt. I knew his voice very well.

It was so unexpected and so—I don't know what to call it, whether pleasant or painful—to come upon it after my feverish wandering journey, and in the midst of the night, that I could not keep back the tears from my eyes. It was like hearing his voice in a strange country.

"My dear Miss Summerson, that you should be out at this hour, and in such weather!"

He had heard from my guardian of my having been called away on some uncommon business and said so to dispense with any explanation. I told

him that we had but just left a coach and were going—but then I was obliged to look at my companion.

"Why, you see, Mr. Woodcourt"—he had caught the name from me —"we are a-going at present into the next street. Inspector Bucket."

Mr. Woodcourt, disregarding my remonstrances, had hurriedly taken off his cloak and was putting it about me. "That's a good move, too," said Mr. Bucket, assisting, "a very good move."

"May I go with you?" said Mr. Woodcourt. I don't know whether to me or to my companion.

"Why, Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Bucket, taking the answer on himself. "Of course you may."

It was all said in a moment, and they took me between them, wrapped in the cloak.

"I have just left Richard," said Mr. Woodcourt. "I have been sitting with him since ten o'clock last night."

"Oh, dear me, he is ill!"

"No, no, believe me; not ill, but not quite well. He was depressed and faint—you know he gets so worried and so worn sometimes—and Ada sent to me of course; and when I came home I found her note and came straight here. Well! Richard revived so much after a little while, and Ada was so happy and so convinced of its being my doing, though God knows I had little enough to do with it, that I remained with him until he had been fast asleep some hours. As fast asleep as she is now, I hope!"

His friendly and familiar way of speaking of them, his unaffected devotion to them, the grateful confidence with which I knew he had inspired my darling, and the comfort he was to her; could I separate all this from his promise to me? How thankless I must have been if it had not recalled the words he said to me when he was so moved by the change in my appearance: "I will accept him as a trust, and it shall be a sacred one!"

We now turned into another narrow street. "Mr. Woodcourt," said Mr. Bucket, who had eyed him closely as we came along, "our business takes us to a law-stationer's here, a certain Mr. Snagsby's. What, you know him, do you?" He was so quick that he saw it in an instant.

"Yes, I know a little of him and have called upon him at this place."

"Indeed, sir?" said Mr. Bucket. "Then you will be so good as to let me leave Miss Summerson with you for a moment while I go and have half a

word with him?”

The last police-officer with whom he had conferred was standing silently behind us. I was not aware of it until he struck in on my saying I heard some one crying.

“Don’t be alarmed, miss,” he returned. “It’s Snagsby’s servant.”

“Why, you see,” said Mr. Bucket, “the girl’s subject to fits, and has ’em bad upon her to-night. A most contrary circumstance it is, for I want certain information out of that girl, and she must be brought to reason somehow.”

“At all events, they wouldn’t be up yet if it wasn’t for her, Mr. Bucket,” said the other man. “She’s been at it pretty well all night, sir.”

“Well, that’s true,” he returned. “My light’s burnt out. Show yours a moment.”

All this passed in a whisper a door or two from the house in which I could faintly hear crying and moaning. In the little round of light produced for the purpose, Mr. Bucket went up to the door and knocked. The door was opened after he had knocked twice, and he went in, leaving us standing in the street.

“Miss Summerson,” said Mr. Woodcourt, “if without obtruding myself on your confidence I may remain near you, pray let me do so.”

“You are truly kind,” I answered. “I need wish to keep no secret of my own from you; if I keep any, it is another’s.”

“I quite understand. Trust me, I will remain near you only so long as I can fully respect it.”

“I trust implicitly to you,” I said. “I know and deeply feel how sacredly you keep your promise.”

After a short time the little round of light shone out again, and Mr. Bucket advanced towards us in it with his earnest face. “Please to come in, Miss Summerson,” he said, “and sit down by the fire. Mr. Woodcourt, from information I have received I understand you are a medical man. Would you look to this girl and see if anything can be done to bring her round. She has a letter somewhere that I particularly want. It’s not in her box, and I think it must be about her; but she is so twisted and clenched up that she is difficult to handle without hurting.”

We all three went into the house together; although it was cold and raw, it smelt close too from being up all night. In the passage behind the door stood a scared, sorrowful-looking little man in a grey coat who seemed to

have a naturally polite manner and spoke meekly.

“Downstairs, if you please, Mr. Bucket,” said he. “The lady will excuse the front kitchen; we use it as our workaday sitting-room. The back is Guster’s bedroom, and in it she’s a-carrying on, poor thing, to a frightful extent!”

We went downstairs, followed by Mr. Snagsby, as I soon found the little man to be. In the front kitchen, sitting by the fire, was Mrs. Snagsby, with very red eyes and a very severe expression of face.

“My little woman,” said Mr. Snagsby, entering behind us, “to wave—not to put too fine a point upon it, my dear—hostilities for one single moment in the course of this prolonged night, here is Inspector Bucket, Mr. Woodcourt, and a lady.”

She looked very much astonished, as she had reason for doing, and looked particularly hard at me.

“My little woman,” said Mr. Snagsby, sitting down in the remotest corner by the door, as if he were taking a liberty, “it is not unlikely that you may inquire of me why Inspector Bucket, Mr. Woodcourt, and a lady call upon us in Cook’s Court, Cursitor Street, at the present hour. I don’t know. I have not the least idea. If I was to be informed, I should despair of understanding, and I’d rather not be told.”

He appeared so miserable, sitting with his head upon his hand, and I appeared so unwelcome, that I was going to offer an apology when Mr. Bucket took the matter on himself.

“Now, Mr. Snagsby,” said he, “the best thing you can do is to go along with Mr. Woodcourt to look after your Guster—”

“My Guster, Mr. Bucket!” cried Mr. Snagsby. “Go on, sir, go on. I shall be charged with that next.”

“And to hold the candle,” pursued Mr. Bucket without correcting himself, “or hold her, or make yourself useful in any way you’re asked. Which there’s not a man alive more ready to do, for you’re a man of urbanity and suavity, you know, and you’ve got the sort of heart that can feel for another. Mr. Woodcourt, would you be so good as see to her, and if you can get that letter from her, to let me have it as soon as ever you can?”

As they went out, Mr. Bucket made me sit down in a corner by the fire and take off my wet shoes, which he turned up to dry upon the fender, talking all the time.

“Don’t you be at all put out, miss, by the want of a hospitable look from Mrs. Snagsby there, because she’s under a mistake altogether. She’ll find that out sooner than will be agreeable to a lady of her generally correct manner of forming her thoughts, because I’m a-going to explain it to her.” Here, standing on the hearth with his wet hat and shawls in his hand, himself a pile of wet, he turned to Mrs. Snagsby. “Now, the first thing that I say to you, as a married woman possessing what you may call charms, you know—‘Believe Me, if All Those Endearing,’ and cetrer—you’re well acquainted with the song, because it’s in vain for you to tell me that you and good society are strangers—charms—attractions, mind you, that ought to give you confidence in yourself—is, that you’ve done it.”

Mrs. Snagsby looked rather alarmed, relented a little and faltered, what did Mr. Bucket mean.

“What does Mr. Bucket mean?” he repeated, and I saw by his face that all the time he talked he was listening for the discovery of the letter, to my own great agitation, for I knew then how important it must be; “I’ll tell you what he means, ma’am. Go and see Othello acted. That’s the tragedy for you.”

Mrs. Snagsby consciously asked why.

“Why?” said Mr. Bucket. “Because you’ll come to that if you don’t look out. Why, at the very moment while I speak, I know what your mind’s not wholly free from respecting this young lady. But shall I tell you who this young lady is? Now, come, you’re what I call an intellectual woman—with your soul too large for your body, if you come to that, and chafing it—and you know me, and you recollect where you saw me last, and what was talked of in that circle. Don’t you? Yes! Very well. This young lady is that young lady.”

Mrs. Snagsby appeared to understand the reference better than I did at the time.

“And Toughey—him as you call Jo—was mixed up in the same business, and no other; and the law-writer that you know of was mixed up in the same business, and no other; and your husband, with no more knowledge of it than your great grandfather, was mixed up (by Mr. Tulkinghorn, deceased, his best customer) in the same business, and no other; and the whole bileing of people was mixed up in the same business, and no other. And yet a married woman, possessing your attractions, shuts

her eyes (and sparklers too), and goes and runs her delicate-formed head against a wall. Why, I am ashamed of you! (I expected Mr. Woodcourt might have got it by this time.)”

Mrs. Snagsby shook her head and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

“Is that all?” said Mr. Bucket excitedly. “No. See what happens. Another person mixed up in that business and no other, a person in a wretched state, comes here to-night and is seen a-speaking to your maid-servant; and between her and your maid-servant there passes a paper that I would give a hundred pound for, down. What do you do? You hide and you watch ’em, and you pounce upon that maid-servant—knowing what she’s subject to and what a little thing will bring ’em on—in that surprising manner and with that severity that, by the Lord, she goes off and keeps off, when a life may be hanging upon that girl’s words!”

He so thoroughly meant what he said now that I involuntarily clasped my hands and felt the room turning away from me. But it stopped. Mr. Woodcourt came in, put a paper into his hand, and went away again.

“Now, Mrs. Snagsby, the only amends you can make,” said Mr. Bucket, rapidly glancing at it, “is to let me speak a word to this young lady in private here. And if you know of any help that you can give to that gentleman in the next kitchen there or can think of any one thing that’s likelier than another to bring the girl round, do your swiftest and best!” In an instant she was gone, and he had shut the door. “Now my dear, you’re steady and quite sure of yourself?”

“Quite,” said I.

“Whose writing is that?”

It was my mother’s. A pencil-writing, on a crushed and torn piece of paper, blotted with wet. Folded roughly like a letter, and directed to me at my guardian’s.

“You know the hand,” he said, “and if you are firm enough to read it to me, do! But be particular to a word.”

It had been written in portions, at different times. I read what follows:

> I came to the cottage with two objects. First, to see the dear one, if I could, once more—but only to see her—not to speak to her or let her know that I was near. The other object, to elude pursuit and to be lost. Do not blame the mother for her share. The assistance that she rendered

me, she rendered on my strongest assurance that it was for the dear one's good. You remember her dead child. The men's consent I bought, but her help was freely given.

"'I came.' That was written," said my companion, "when she rested there. It bears out what I made of it. I was right."

The next was written at another time:

I have wandered a long distance, and for many hours, and I know that I must soon die. These streets! I have no purpose but to die. When I left, I had a worse, but I am saved from adding that guilt to the rest. Cold, wet, and fatigue are sufficient causes for my being found dead, but I shall die of others, though I suffer from these. It was right that all that had sustained me should give way at once and that I should die of terror and my conscience.

"Take courage," said Mr. Bucket. "There's only a few words more."

Those, too, were written at another time. To all appearance, almost in the dark:

I have done all I could do to be lost. I shall be soon forgotten so, and shall disgrace him least. I have nothing about me by which I can be recognized. This paper I part with now. The place where I shall lie down, if I can get so far, has been often in my mind. Farewell. Forgive.

Mr. Bucket, supporting me with his arm, lowered me gently into my chair. "Cheer up! Don't think me hard with you, my dear, but as soon as ever you feel equal to it, get your shoes on and be ready."

I did as he required, but I was left there a long time, praying for my unhappy mother. They were all occupied with the poor girl, and I heard Mr. Woodcourt directing them and speaking to her often. At length he came in with Mr. Bucket and said that as it was important to address her gently, he thought it best that I should ask her for whatever information we desired to obtain. There was no doubt that she could now reply to questions if she were soothed and not alarmed. The questions, Mr. Bucket said, were how she came by the letter, what passed between her and the person who gave her the letter, and where the person went. Holding my mind as steadily as I

could to these points, I went into the next room with them. Mr. Woodcourt would have remained outside, but at my solicitation went in with us.

The poor girl was sitting on the floor where they had laid her down. They stood around her, though at a little distance, that she might have air. She was not pretty and looked weak and poor, but she had a plaintive and a good face, though it was still a little wild. I kneeled on the ground beside her and put her poor head upon my shoulder, whereupon she drew her arm round my neck and burst into tears.

"My poor girl," said I, laying my face against her forehead, for indeed I was crying too, and trembling, "it seems cruel to trouble you now, but more depends on our knowing something about this letter than I could tell you in an hour."

She began piteously declaring that she didn't mean any harm, she didn't mean any harm, Mrs. Snagsby!

"We are all sure of that," said I. "But pray tell me how you got it."

"Yes, dear lady, I will, and tell you true. I'll tell true, indeed, Mrs. Snagsby."

"I am sure of that," said I. "And how was it?"

"I had been out on an errand, dear lady—long after it was dark—quite late; and when I came home, I found a common-looking person, all wet and muddy, looking up at our house. When she saw me coming in at the door, she called me back and said did I live here. And I said yes, and she said she knew only one or two places about here, but had lost her way and couldn't find them. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do! They won't believe me! She didn't say any harm to me, and I didn't say any harm to her, indeed, Mrs. Snagsby!"

It was necessary for her mistress to comfort her—which she did, I must say, with a good deal of contrition—before she could be got beyond this.

"She could not find those places," said I.

"No!" cried the girl, shaking her head. "No! Couldn't find them. And she was so faint, and lame, and miserable, Oh so wretched, that if you had seen her, Mr. Snagsby, you'd have given her half a crown, I know!"

"Well, Guster, my girl," said he, at first not knowing what to say. "I hope I should."

"And yet she was so well spoken," said the girl, looking at me with wide open eyes, "that it made a person's heart bleed. And so she said to me, did I

know the way to the burying ground? And I asked her which burying ground. And she said, the poor burying ground. And so I told her I had been a poor child myself, and it was according to parishes. But she said she meant a poor burying ground not very far from here, where there was an archway, and a step, and an iron gate."

As I watched her face and soothed her to go on, I saw that Mr. Bucket received this with a look which I could not separate from one of alarm.

"Oh, dear, dear!" cried the girl, pressing her hair back with her hands. "What shall I do, what shall I do! She meant the burying ground where the man was buried that took the sleeping-stuff—that you came home and told us of, Mr. Snagsby—that frightened me so, Mrs. Snagsby. Oh, I am frightened again. Hold me!"

"You are so much better now," sald I. "Pray, pray tell me more."

"Yes I will, yes I will! But don't be angry with me, that's a dear lady, because I have been so ill."

Angry with her, poor soul!

"There! Now I will, now I will. So she said, could I tell her how to find it, and I said yes, and I told her; and she looked at me with eyes like almost as if she was blind, and herself all waving back. And so she took out the letter, and showed it me, and said if she was to put that in the post-office, it would be rubbed out and not minded and never sent; and would I take it from her, and send it, and the messenger would be paid at the house. And so I said yes, if it was no harm, and she said no—no harm. And so I took it from her, and she said she had nothing to give me, and I said I was poor myself and consequently wanted nothing. And so she said God bless you, and went."

"And did she go—"

"Yes," cried the girl, anticipating the inquiry. "Yes! She went the way I had shown her. Then I came in, and Mrs. Snagsby came behind me from somewhere and laid hold of me, and I was frightened."

Mr. Woodcourt took her kindly from me. Mr. Bucket wrapped me up, and immediately we were in the street. Mr. Woodcourt hesitated, but I said, "Don't leave me now!" and Mr. Bucket added, "You'll be better with us, we may want you; don't lose time!"

I have the most confused impressions of that walk. I recollect that it was neither night nor day, that morning was dawning but the street-lamps were

not yet put out, that the sleet was still falling and that all the ways were deep with it. I recollect a few chilled people passing in the streets. I recollect the wet house-tops, the clogged and bursting gutters and water-spouts, the mounds of blackened ice and snow over which we passed, the narrowness of the courts by which we went. At the same time I remember that the poor girl seemed to be yet telling her story audibly and plainly in my hearing, that I could feel her resting on my arm, that the stained house-fronts put on human shapes and looked at me, that great water-gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head or in the air, and that the unreal things were more substantial than the real.

At last we stood under a dark and miserable covered way, where one lamp was burning over an iron gate and where the morning faintly struggled in. The gate was closed. Beyond it was a burial ground—a dreadful spot in which the night was very slowly stirring, but where I could dimly see heaps of dishonoured graves and stones, hemmed in by filthy houses with a few dull lights in their windows and on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease. On the step at the gate, drenched in the fearful wet of such a place, which oozed and splashed down everywhere, I saw, with a cry of pity and horror, a woman lying—Jenny, the mother of the dead child.

I ran forward, but they stopped me, and Mr. Woodcourt entreated me with the greatest earnestness, even with tears, before I went up to the figure to listen for an instant to what Mr. Bucket said. I did so, as I thought. I did so, as I am sure.

“Miss Summerson, you’ll understand me, if you think a moment. They changed clothes at the cottage.”

They changed clothes at the cottage. I could repeat the words in my mind, and I knew what they meant of themselves, but I attached no meaning to them in any other connexion.

“And one returned,” said Mr. Bucket, “and one went on. And the one that went on only went on a certain way agreed upon to deceive and then turned across country and went home. Think a moment!”

I could repeat this in my mind too, but I had not the least idea what it meant. I saw before me, lying on the step, the mother of the dead child. She lay there with one arm creeping round a bar of the iron gate and seeming to embrace it. She lay there, who had so lately spoken to my mother. She lay there, a distressed, unsheltered, senseless creature. She who had brought my

mother’s letter, who could give me the only clue to where my mother was; she, who was to guide us to rescue and save her whom we had sought so far, who had come to this condition by some means connected with my mother that I could not follow, and might be passing beyond our reach and help at that moment; she lay there, and they stopped me! I saw but did not comprehend the solemn and compassionate look in Mr. Woodcourt’s face. I saw but did not comprehend his touching the other on the breast to keep him back. I saw him stand uncovered in the bitter air, with a reverence for something. But my understanding for all this was gone.

I even heard it said between them, “Shall she go?”

“She had better go. Her hands should be the first to touch her. They have a higher right than ours.”

I passed on to the gate and stooped down. I lifted the heavy head, put the long dank hair aside, and turned the face. And it was my mother, cold and dead.

CHAPTER LX

Perspective

I PROCEED TO OTHER passages of my narrative. From the goodness of all about me I derived such consolation as I can never think of unmoved. I have already said so much of myself, and so much still remains, that I will not dwell upon my sorrow. I had an illness, but it was not a long one; and I would avoid even this mention of it if I could quite keep down the recollection of their sympathy.

I proceed to other passages of my narrative.

During the time of my illness, we were still in London, where Mrs. Woodcourt had come, on my guardian's invitation, to stay with us. When my guardian thought me well and cheerful enough to talk with him in our old way—though I could have done that sooner if he would have believed me—I resumed my work and my chair beside his. He had appointed the time himself, and we were alone.

"Dame Trot," said he, receiving me with a kiss, "welcome to the growlery again, my dear. I have a scheme to develop, little woman. I propose to remain here, perhaps for six months, perhaps for a longer time—as it may be. Quite to settle here for a while, in short."

"And in the meanwhile leave Bleak House?" said I.

"Aye, my dear? Bleak House," he returned, "must learn to take care of itself."

I thought his tone sounded sorrowful, but looking at him, I saw his kind face lighted up by its pleasantest smile.

"Bleak House," he repeated—and his tone did NOT sound sorrowful, I found—"must learn to take care of itself. It is a long way from Ada, my dear, and Ada stands much in need of you."

"It's like you, guardian," said I, "to have been taking that into consideration for a happy surprise to both of us."

"Not so disinterested either, my dear, if you mean to extol me for that virtue, since if you were generally on the road, you could be seldom with

me. And besides, I wish to hear as much and as often of Ada as I can in this condition of estrangement from poor Rick. Not of her alone, but of him too, poor fellow."

"Have you seen Mr. Woodcourt, this morning, guardian?"

"I see Mr. Woodcourt every morning, Dame Durden."

"Does he still say the same of Richard?"

"Just the same. He knows of no direct bodily illness that he has; on the contrary, he believes that he has none. Yet he is not easy about him; who CAN be?"

My dear girl had been to see us lately every day, some times twice in a day. But we had foreseen, all along, that this would only last until I was quite myself. We knew full well that her fervent heart was as full of affection and gratitude towards her cousin John as it had ever been, and we acquitted Richard of laying any injunctions upon her to stay away; but we knew on the other hand that she felt it a part of her duty to him to be sparing of her visits at our house. My guardian's delicacy had soon perceived this and had tried to convey to her that he thought she was right.

"Dear, unfortunate, mistaken Richard," said I. "When will he awake from his delusion!"

"He is not in the way to do so now, my dear," replied my guardian. "The more he suffers, the more averse he will be to me, having made me the principal representative of the great occasion of his suffering."

I could not help adding, "So unreasonably!"

"Ah, Dame Trot, Dame Trot," returned my guardian, "what shall we find reasonable in Jarndyce and Jarndyce! Unreason and injustice at the top, unreason and injustice at the heart and at the bottom, unreason and injustice from beginning to end—if it ever has an end—how should poor Rick, always hovering near it, pluck reason out of it? He no more gathers grapes from thorns or figs from thistles than older men did in old times."

His gentleness and consideration for Richard whenever we spoke of him touched me so that I was always silent on this subject very soon.

"I suppose the Lord Chancellor, and the Vice Chancellors, and the whole Chancery battery of great guns would be infinitely astonished by such unreason and injustice in one of their suitors," pursued my guardian. "When those learned gentlemen begin to raise moss-roses from the powder they sow in their wigs, I shall begin to be astonished too!"

He checked himself in glancing towards the window to look where the wind was and leaned on the back of my chair instead.

“Well, well, little woman! To go on, my dear. This rock we must leave to time, chance, and hopeful circumstance. We must not shipwreck Ada upon it. She cannot afford, and he cannot afford, the remotest chance of another separation from a friend. Therefore I have particularly begged of Woodcourt, and I now particularly beg of you, my dear, not to move this subject with Rick. Let it rest. Next week, next month, next year, sooner or later, he will see me with clearer eyes. I can wait.”

But I had already discussed it with him, I confessed; and so, I thought, had Mr. Woodcourt.

“So he tells me,” returned my guardian. “Very good. He has made his protest, and Dame Durden has made hers, and there is nothing more to be said about it. Now I come to Mrs. Woodcourt. How do you like her, my dear?”

In answer to this question, which was oddly abrupt, I said I liked her very much and thought she was more agreeable than she used to be.

“I think so too,” said my guardian. “Less pedigree? Not so much of Morgan ap—what’s his name?”

That was what I meant, I acknowledged, though he was a very harmless person, even when we had had more of him.

“Still, upon the whole, he is as well in his native mountains,” said my guardian. “I agree with you. Then, little woman, can I do better for a time than retain Mrs. Woodcourt here?”

No. And yet—

My guardian looked at me, waiting for what I had to say.

I had nothing to say. At least I had nothing in my mind that I could say. I had an undefined impression that it might have been better if we had had some other inmate, but I could hardly have explained why even to myself. Or, if to myself, certainly not to anybody else.

“You see,” said my guardian, “our neighbourhood is in Woodcourt’s way, and he can come here to see her as often as he likes, which is agreeable to them both; and she is familiar to us and fond of you.”

Yes. That was undeniable. I had nothing to say against it. I could not have suggested a better arrangement, but I was not quite easy in my mind. Esther, Esther, why not? Esther, think!

“It is a very good plan indeed, dear guardian, and we could not do better.”

“Sure, little woman?”

Quite sure. I had had a moment’s time to think, since I had urged that duty on myself, and I was quite sure.

“Good,” said my guardian. “It shall be done. Carried unanimously.”

“Carried unanimously,” I repeated, going on with my work.

It was a cover for his book-table that I happened to be ornamenting. It had been laid by on the night preceding my sad journey and never resumed. I showed it to him now, and he admired it highly. After I had explained the pattern to him and all the great effects that were to come out by and by, I thought I would go back to our last theme.

“You said, dear guardian, when we spoke of Mr. Woodcourt before Ada left us, that you thought he would give a long trial to another country. Have you been advising him since?”

“Yes, little woman, pretty often.”

“Has he decided to do so?”

“I rather think not.”

“Some other prospect has opened to him, perhaps?” said I.

“Why—yes—perhaps,” returned my guardian, beginning his answer in a very deliberate manner. “About half a year hence or so, there is a medical attendant for the poor to be appointed at a certain place in Yorkshire. It is a thriving place, pleasantly situated—streams and streets, town and country, mill and moor—and seems to present an opening for such a man. I mean a man whose hopes and aims may sometimes lie (as most men’s sometimes do, I dare say) above the ordinary level, but to whom the ordinary level will be high enough after all if it should prove to be a way of usefulness and good service leading to no other. All generous spirits are ambitious, I suppose, but the ambition that calmly trusts itself to such a road, instead of spasmodically trying to fly over it, is of the kind I care for. It is Woodcourt’s kind.”

“And will he get this appointment?” I asked.

“Why, little woman,” returned my guardian, smiling, “not being an oracle, I cannot confidently say, but I think so. His reputation stands very high; there were people from that part of the country in the shipwreck; and strange to say, I believe the best man has the best chance. You must not

suppose it to be a fine endowment. It is a very, very commonplace affair, my dear, an appointment to a great amount of work and a small amount of pay; but better things will gather about it, it may be fairly hoped."

"The poor of that place will have reason to bless the choice if it falls on Mr. Woodcourt, guardian."

"You are right, little woman; that I am sure they will."

We said no more about it, nor did he say a word about the future of Bleak House. But it was the first time I had taken my seat at his side in my mourning dress, and that accounted for it, I considered.

I now began to visit my dear girl every day in the dull dark corner where she lived. The morning was my usual time, but whenever I found I had an hour or so to spare, I put on my bonnet and bustled off to Chancery Lane. They were both so glad to see me at all hours, and used to brighten up so when they heard me opening the door and coming in (being quite at home, I never knocked), that I had no fear of becoming troublesome just yet.

On these occasions I frequently found Richard absent. At other times he would be writing or reading papers in the cause at that table of his, so covered with papers, which was never disturbed. Sometimes I would come upon him lingering at the door of Mr. Vholes's office. Sometimes I would meet him in the neighbourhood lounging about and biting his nails. I often met him wandering in Lincoln's Inn, near the place where I had first seen him, oh how different, how different!

That the money Ada brought him was melting away with the candles I used to see burning after dark in Mr. Vholes's office I knew very well. It was not a large amount in the beginning, he had married in debt, and I could not fail to understand, by this time, what was meant by Mr. Vholes's shoulder being at the wheel—as I still heard it was. My dear made the best of housekeepers and tried hard to save, but I knew that they were getting poorer and poorer every day.

She shone in the miserable corner like a beautiful star. She adorned and graced it so that it became another place. Paler than she had been at home, and a little quieter than I had thought natural when she was yet so cheerful and hopeful, her face was so unshadowed that I half believed she was blinded by her love for Richard to his ruinous career.

I went one day to dine with them while I was under this impression. As I turned into Symond's Inn, I met little Miss Flite coming out. She had been

to make a stately call upon the wards in Jarndyce, as she still called them, and had derived the highest gratification from that ceremony. Ada had already told me that she called every Monday at five o'clock, with one little extra white bow in her bonnet, which never appeared there at any other time, and with her largest reticule of documents on her arm.

"My dear!" she began. "So delighted! How do you do! So glad to see you. And you are going to visit our interesting Jarndyce wards? TO be sure! Our beauty is at home, my dear, and will be charmed to see you."

"Then Richard is not come in yet?" said I. "I am glad of that, for I was afraid of being a little late."

"No, he is not come in," returned Miss Flite. "He has had a long day in court. I left him there with Vholes. You don't like Vholes, I hope? DON'T like Vholes. Dan-gerous man!"

"I am afraid you see Richard oftener than ever now," said I.

"My dearest," returned Miss Flite, "daily and hourly. You know what I told you of the attraction on the Chancellor's table? My dear, next to myself he is the most constant suitor in court. He begins quite to amuse our little party. Ve-ry friendly little party, are we not?"

It was miserable to hear this from her poor mad lips, though it was no surprise.

"In short, my valued friend," pursued Miss Flite, advancing her lips to my ear with an air of equal patronage and mystery, "I must tell you a secret. I have made him my executor. Nominated, constituted, and appointed him. In my will. Ye-es."

"Indeed?" said I.

"Ye-es," repeated Miss Flite in her most genteel accents, "my executor, administrator, and assign. (Our Chancery phrases, my love.) I have reflected that if I should wear out, he will be able to watch that judgment. Being so very regular in his attendance."

It made me sigh to think of him.

"I did at one time mean," said Miss Flite, echoing the sigh, "to nominate, constitute, and appoint poor Gridley. Also very regular, my charming girl. I assure you, most exemplary! But he wore out, poor man, so I have appointed his successor. Don't mention it. This is in confidence."

She carefully opened her reticule a little way and showed me a folded piece of paper inside as the appointment of which she spoke.

“Another secret, my dear. I have added to my collection of birds.”

“Really, Miss Flite?” said I, knowing how it pleased her to have her confidence received with an appearance of interest.

She nodded several times, and her face became overcast and gloomy. “Two more. I call them the Wards in Jarndyce. They are caged up with all the others. With Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach!”

The poor soul kissed me with the most troubled look I had ever seen in her and went her way. Her manner of running over the names of her birds, as if she were afraid of hearing them even from her own lips, quite chilled me.

This was not a cheering preparation for my visit, and I could have dispensed with the company of Mr. Vholes, when Richard (who arrived within a minute or two after me) brought him to share our dinner. Although it was a very plain one, Ada and Richard were for some minutes both out of the room together helping to get ready what we were to eat and drink. Mr. Vholes took that opportunity of holding a little conversation in a low voice with me. He came to the window where I was sitting and began upon Symond’s Inn.

“A dull place, Miss Summerson, for a life that is not an official one,” said Mr. Vholes, smearing the glass with his black glove to make it clearer for me.

“There is not much to see here,” said I.

“Nor to hear, miss,” returned Mr. Vholes. “A little music does occasionally stray in, but we are not musical in the law and soon eject it. I hope Mr. Jarndyce is as well as his friends could wish him?”

I thanked Mr. Vholes and said he was quite well.

“I have not the pleasure to be admitted among the number of his friends myself,” said Mr. Vholes, “and I am aware that the gentlemen of our profession are sometimes regarded in such quarters with an unfavourable eye. Our plain course, however, under good report and evil report, and all kinds of prejudice (we are the victims of prejudice), is to have everything openly carried on. How do you find Mr. C. looking, Miss Summerson?”

“He looks very ill. Dreadfully anxious.”

“Just so,” said Mr. Vholes.

He stood behind me with his long black figure reaching nearly to the ceiling of those low rooms, feeling the pimples on his face as if they were ornaments and speaking inwardly and evenly as though there were not a human passion or emotion in his nature.

"Mr. Woodcourt is in attendance upon Mr. C., I believe?" he resumed.

"Mr. Woodcourt is his disinterested friend," I answered.

"But I mean in professional attendance, medical attendance."

"That can do little for an unhappy mind," said I.

"Just so," said Mr. Vholes.

So slow, so eager, so bloodless and gaunt, I felt as if Richard were wasting away beneath the eyes of this adviser and there were something of the vampire in him.

"Miss Summerson," said Mr. Vholes, very slowly rubbing his gloved hands, as if, to his cold sense of touch, they were much the same in black kid or out of it, "this was an ill-advised marriage of Mr. C.'s."

I begged he would excuse me from discussing it. They had been engaged when they were both very young, I told him (a little indignantly) and when the prospect before them was much fairer and brighter. When Richard had not yielded himself to the unhappy influence which now darkened his life.

"Just so," assented Mr. Vholes again. "Still, with a view to everything being openly carried on, I will, with your permission, Miss Summerson, observe to you that I consider this a very ill-advised marriage indeed. I owe the opinion not only to Mr. C.'s connexions, against whom I should naturally wish to protect myself, but also to my own reputation—dear to myself as a professional man aiming to keep respectable; dear to my three girls at home, for whom I am striving to realize some little independence; dear, I will even say, to my aged father, whom it is my privilege to support."

"It would become a very different marriage, a much happier and better marriage, another marriage altogether, Mr. Vholes," said I, "if Richard were persuaded to turn his back on the fatal pursuit in which you are engaged with him."

Mr. Vholes, with a noiseless cough—or rather gasp—into one of his black gloves, inclined his head as if he did not wholly dispute even that.

"Miss Summerson," he said, "it may be so; and I freely admit that the young lady who has taken Mr. C.'s name upon herself in so ill-advised a manner—you will I am sure not quarrel with me for throwing out that

remark again, as a duty I owe to Mr. C.'s connexions—is a highly genteel young lady. Business has prevented me from mixing much with general society in any but a professional character; still I trust I am competent to perceive that she is a highly genteel young lady. As to beauty, I am not a judge of that myself, and I never did give much attention to it from a boy, but I dare say the young lady is equally eligible in that point of view. She is considered so (I have heard) among the clerks in the Inn, and it is a point more in their way than in mine. In reference to Mr. C.'s pursuit of his interests—"

"Oh! His interests, Mr. Vholes!"

"Pardon me," returned Mr. Vholes, going on in exactly the same inward and dispassionate manner. "Mr. C. takes certain interests under certain wills disputed in the suit. It is a term we use. In reference to Mr. C,'s pursuit of his interests, I mentioned to you, Miss Summerson, the first time I had the pleasure of seeing you, in my desire that everything should be openly carried on—I used those words, for I happened afterwards to note them in my diary, which is producible at any time—I mentioned to you that Mr. C. had laid down the principle of watching his own interests, and that when a client of mine laid down a principle which was not of an immoral (that is to say, unlawful) nature, it devolved upon me to carry it out. I HAVE carried it out; I do carry it out. But I will not smooth things over to any connexion of Mr. C.'s on any account. As open as I was to Mr. Jarndyce, I am to you. I regard it in the light of a professional duty to be so, though it can be charged to no one. I openly say, unpalatable as it may be, that I consider Mr. C.'s affairs in a very bad way, that I consider Mr. C. himself in a very bad way, and that I regard this as an exceedingly ill-advised marriage. Am I here, sir? Yes, I thank you; I am here, Mr. C., and enjoying the pleasure of some agreeable conversation with Miss Summerson, for which I have to thank you very much, sir!"

He broke off thus in answer to Richard, who addressed him as he came into the room. By this time I too well understood Mr. Vholes's scrupulous way of saving himself and his respectability not to feel that our worst fears did but keep pace with his client's progress.

We sat down to dinner, and I had an opportunity of observing Richard, anxiously. I was not disturbed by Mr. Vholes (who took off his gloves to dine), though he sat opposite to me at the small table, for I doubt if, looking

up at all, he once removed his eyes from his host's face. I found Richard thin and languid, slovenly in his dress, abstracted in his manner, forcing his spirits now and then, and at other intervals relapsing into a dull thoughtfulness. About his large bright eyes that used to be so merry there was a wanness and a restlessness that changed them altogether. I cannot use the expression that he looked old. There is a ruin of youth which is not like age, and into such a ruin Richard's youth and youthful beauty had all fallen away.

He ate little and seemed indifferent what it was, showed himself to be much more impatient than he used to be, and was quick even with Ada. I thought at first that his old light-hearted manner was all gone, but it shone out of him sometimes as I had occasionally known little momentary glimpses of my own old face to look out upon me from the glass. His laugh had not quite left him either, but it was like the echo of a joyful sound, and that is always sorrowful.

Yet he was as glad as ever, in his old affectionate way, to have me there, and we talked of the old times pleasantly. These did not appear to be interesting to Mr. Vholes, though he occasionally made a gasp which I believe was his smile. He rose shortly after dinner and said that with the permission of the ladies he would retire to his office.

"Always devoted to business, Vholes!" cried Richard.

"Yes, Mr. C.," he returned, "the interests of clients are never to be neglected, sir. They are paramount in the thoughts of a professional man like myself, who wishes to preserve a good name among his fellow-practitioners and society at large. My denying myself the pleasure of the present agreeable conversation may not be wholly irrespective of your own interests, Mr. C."

Richard expressed himself quite sure of that and lighted Mr. Vholes out. On his return he told us, more than once, that Vholes was a good fellow, a safe fellow, a man who did what he pretended to do, a very good fellow indeed! He was so defiant about it that it struck me he had begun to doubt Mr. Vholes.

Then he threw himself on the sofa, tired out; and Ada and I put things to rights, for they had no other servant than the woman who attended to the chambers. My dear girl had a cottage piano there and quietly sat down to sing some of Richard's favourites, the lamp being first removed into the

next room, as he complained of its hurting his eyes.

I sat between them, at my dear girl's side, and felt very melancholy listening to her sweet voice. I think Richard did too; I think he darkened the room for that reason. She had been singing some time, rising between whiles to bend over him and speak to him, when Mr. Woodcourt came in. Then he sat down by Richard and half playfully, half earnestly, quite naturally and easily, found out how he felt and where he had been all day. Presently he proposed to accompany him in a short walk on one of the bridges, as it was a moonlight airy night; and Richard readily consenting, they went out together.

They left my dear girl still sitting at the piano and me still sitting beside her. When they were gone out, I drew my arm round her waist. She put her left hand in mine (I was sitting on that side), but kept her right upon the keys, going over and over them without striking any note.

"Esther, my dearest," she said, breaking silence, "Richard is never so well and I am never so easy about him as when he is with Allan Woodcourt. We have to thank you for that."

I pointed out to my darling how this could scarcely be, because Mr. Woodcourt had come to her cousin John's house and had known us all there, and because he had always liked Richard, and Richard had always liked him, and—and so forth.

"All true," said Ada, "but that he is such a devoted friend to us we owe to you."

I thought it best to let my dear girl have her way and to say no more about it. So I said as much. I said it lightly, because I felt her trembling.

"Esther, my dearest, I want to be a good wife, a very, very good wife indeed. You shall teach me."

I teach! I said no more, for I noticed the hand that was fluttering over the keys, and I knew that it was not I who ought to speak, that it was she who had something to say to me.

"When I married Richard I was not insensible to what was before him. I had been perfectly happy for a long time with you, and I had never known any trouble or anxiety, so loved and cared for, but I understood the danger he was in, dear Esther."

"I know, I know, my darling."

"When we were married I had some little hope that I might be able to

convince him of his mistake, that he might come to regard it in a new way as my husband and not pursue it all the more desperately for my sake—as he does. But if I had not had that hope, I would have married him just the same, Esther. Just the same!”

In the momentary firmness of the hand that was never still—a firmness inspired by the utterance of these last words, and dying away with them—I saw the confirmation of her earnest tones.

“You are not to think, my dearest Esther, that I fail to see what you see and fear what you fear. No one can understand him better than I do. The greatest wisdom that ever lived in the world could scarcely know Richard better than my love does.”

She spoke so modestly and softly and her trembling hand expressed such agitation as it moved to and fro upon the silent notes! My dear, dear girl!

“I see him at his worst every day. I watch him in his sleep. I know every change of his face. But when I married Richard I was quite determined, Esther, if heaven would help me, never to show him that I grieved for what he did and so to make him more unhappy. I want him, when he comes home, to find no trouble in my face. I want him, when he looks at me, to see what he loved in me. I married him to do this, and this supports me.”

I felt her trembling more. I waited for what was yet to come, and I now thought I began to know what it was.

“And something else supports me, Esther.”

She stopped a minute. Stopped speaking only; her hand was still in motion.

“I look forward a little while, and I don’t know what great aid may come to me. When Richard turns his eyes upon me then, there may be something lying on my breast more eloquent than I have been, with greater power than mine to show him his true course and win him back.”

Her hand stopped now. She clasped me in her arms, and I clasped her in mine.

“If that little creature should fail too, Esther, I still look forward. I look forward a long while, through years and years, and think that then, when I am growing old, or when I am dead perhaps, a beautiful woman, his daughter, happily married, may be proud of him and a blessing to him. Or that a generous brave man, as handsome as he used to be, as hopeful, and far more happy, may walk in the sunshine with him, honouring his grey

head and saying to himself, ‘I thank God this is my father! Ruined by a fatal inheritance, and restored through me!’”

Oh, my sweet girl, what a heart was that which beat so fast against me!

“These hopes uphold me, my dear Esther, and I know they will. Though sometimes even they depart from me before a dread that arises when I look at Richard.”

I tried to cheer my darling, and asked her what it was. Sobbing and weeping, she replied, “That he may not live to see his child.”

CHAPTER LXI

A Discovery

THE DAYS WHEN I frequented that miserable corner which my dear girl brightened can never fade in my remembrance. I never see it, and I never wish to see it now; I have been there only once since, but in my memory there is a mournful glory shining on the place which will shine for ever.

Not a day passed without my going there, of course. At first I found Mr. Skimpole there, on two or three occasions, idly playing the piano and talking in his usual vivacious strain. Now, besides my very much mistrusting the probability of his being there without making Richard poorer, I felt as if there were something in his careless gaiety too inconsistent with what I knew of the depths of Ada's life. I clearly perceived, too, that Ada shared my feelings. I therefore resolved, after much thinking of it, to make a private visit to Mr. Skimpole and try delicately to explain myself. My dear girl was the great consideration that made me bold.

I set off one morning, accompanied by Charley, for Somers Town. As I approached the house, I was strongly inclined to turn back, for I felt what a desperate attempt it was to make an impression on Mr. Skimpole and how extremely likely it was that he would signally defeat me. However, I thought that being there, I would go through with it. I knocked with a trembling hand at Mr. Skimpole's door—literally with a hand, for the knocker was gone—and after a long parley gained admission from an Irishwoman, who was in the area when I knocked, breaking up the lid of a water-butt with a poker to light the fire with.

Mr. Skimpole, lying on the sofa in his room, playing the flute a little, was enchanted to see me. Now, who should receive me, he asked. Who would I prefer for mistress of the ceremonies? Would I have his Comedy daughter, his Beauty daughter, or his Sentiment daughter? Or would I have all the daughters at once in a perfect nosegay?

I replied, half defeated already, that I wished to speak to himself only if he would give me leave.

“My dear Miss Summerson, most joyfully! Of course,” he said, bringing his chair nearer mine and breaking into his fascinating smile, “of course it’s not business. Then it’s pleasure!”

I said it certainly was not business that I came upon, but it was not quite a pleasant matter.

“Then, my dear Miss Summerson,” said he with the frankest gaiety, “don’t allude to it. Why should you allude to anything that is NOT a pleasant matter? I never do. And you are a much pleasanter creature, in every point of view, than I. You are perfectly pleasant; I am imperfectly pleasant; then, if I never allude to an unpleasant matter, how much less should you! So that’s disposed of, and we will talk of something else.”

Although I was embarrassed, I took courage to intimate that I still wished to pursue the subject.

“I should think it a mistake,” said Mr. Skimpole with his airy laugh, “if I thought Miss Summerson capable of making one. But I don’t!”

“Mr. Skimpole,” said I, raising my eyes to his, “I have so often heard you say that you are unacquainted with the common affairs of life—”

“Meaning our three banking-house friends, L, S, and who’s the junior partner? D?” said Mr. Skimpole, brightly. “Not an idea of them!”

“—That perhaps,” I went on, “you will excuse my boldness on that account. I think you ought most seriously to know that Richard is poorer than he was.”

“Dear me!” said Mr. Skimpole. “So am I, they tell me.”

“And in very embarrassed circumstances.”

“Parallel case, exactly!” said Mr. Skimpole with a delighted countenance.

“This at present naturally causes Ada much secret anxiety, and as I think she is less anxious when no claims are made upon her by visitors, and as Richard has one uneasiness always heavy on his mind, it has occurred to me to take the liberty of saying that—if you would—not—”

I was coming to the point with great difficulty when he took me by both hands and with a radiant face and in the liveliest way anticipated it.

“Not go there? Certainly not, my dear Miss Summerson, most assuredly not. Why SHOULD I go there? When I go anywhere, I go for pleasure. I don’t go anywhere for pain, because I was made for pleasure. Pain comes to ME when it wants me. Now, I have had very little pleasure at our dear Richard’s

lately, and your practical sagacity demonstrates why. Our young friends, losing the youthful poetry which was once so captivating in them, begin to think, ‘This is a man who wants pounds.’ So I am; I always want pounds; not for myself, but because tradespeople always want them of me. Next, our young friends begin to think, becoming mercenary, ‘This is the man who HAD pounds, who borrowed them,’ which I did. I always borrow pounds. So our young friends, reduced to prose (which is much to be regretted), degenerate in their power of imparting pleasure to me. Why should I go to see them, therefore? Absurd!”

Through the beaming smile with which he regarded me as he reasoned thus, there now broke forth a look of disinterested benevolence quite astonishing.

“Besides,” he said, pursuing his argument in his tone of light-hearted conviction, “if I don’t go anywhere for pain—which would be a perversion of the intention of my being, and a monstrous thing to do—why should I go anywhere to be the cause of pain? If I went to see our young friends in their present ill-regulated state of mind, I should give them pain. The associations with me would be disagreeable. They might say, ‘This is the man who had pounds and who can’t pay pounds,’ which I can’t, of course; nothing could be more out of the question! Then kindness requires that I shouldn’t go near them—and I won’t.”

He finished by genially kissing my hand and thanking me. Nothing but Miss Summerson’s fine tact, he said, would have found this out for him.

I was much disconcerted, but I reflected that if the main point were gained, it mattered little how strangely he perverted everything leading to it. I had determined to mention something else, however, and I thought I was not to be put off in that.

“Mr. Skimpole,” said I, “I must take the liberty of saying before I conclude my visit that I was much surprised to learn, on the best authority, some little time ago, that you knew with whom that poor boy left Bleak House and that you accepted a present on that occasion. I have not mentioned it to my guardian, for I fear it would hurt him unnecessarily; but I may say to you that I was much surprised.”

“No? Really surprised, my dear Miss Summerson?” he returned inquiringly, raising his pleasant eyebrows.

“Greatly surprised.”

He thought about it for a little while with a highly agreeable and whimsical expression of face, then quite gave it up and said in his most engaging manner, “You know what a child I am. Why surprised?”

I was reluctant to enter minutely into that question, but as he begged I would, for he was really curious to know, I gave him to understand in the gentlest words I could use that his conduct seemed to involve a disregard of several moral obligations. He was much amused and interested when he heard this and said, “No, really?” with ingenuous simplicity.

“You know I don’t intend to be responsible. I never could do it. Responsibility is a thing that has always been above me—or below me,” said Mr. Skimpole. “I don’t even know which; but as I understand the way in which my dear Miss Summerson (always remarkable for her practical good sense and clearness) puts this case, I should imagine it was chiefly a question of money, do you know?”

I incautiously gave a qualified assent to this.

“Ah! Then you see,” said Mr. Skimpole, shaking his head, “I am hopeless of understanding it.”

I suggested, as I rose to go, that it was not right to betray my guardian’s confidence for a bribe.

“My dear Miss Summerson,” he returned with a candid hilarity that was all his own, “I can’t be bribed.”

“Not by Mr. Bucket?” said I.

“No,” said he. “Not by anybody. I don’t attach any value to money. I don’t care about it, I don’t know about it, I don’t want it, I don’t keep it—it goes away from me directly. How can I be bribed?”

I showed that I was of a different opinion, though I had not the capacity for arguing the question.

“On the contrary,” said Mr. Skimpole, “I am exactly the man to be placed in a superior position in such a case as that. I am above the rest of mankind in such a case as that. I can act with philosophy in such a case as that. I am not warped by prejudices, as an Italian baby is by bandages. I am as free as the air. I feel myself as far above suspicion as Caesar’s wife.”

Anything to equal the lightness of his manner and the playful impartiality with which he seemed to convince himself, as he tossed the matter about like a ball of feathers, was surely never seen in anybody else!

“Observe the case, my dear Miss Summerson. Here is a boy received

into the house and put to bed in a state that I strongly object to. The boy being in bed, a man arrives—like the house that Jack built. Here is the man who demands the boy who is received into the house and put to bed in a state that I strongly object to. Here is a bank-note produced by the man who demands the boy who is received into the house and put to bed in a state that I strongly object to. Here is the Skimpole who accepts the bank-note produced by the man who demands the boy who is received into the house and put to bed in a state that I strongly object to. Those are the facts. Very well. Should the Skimpole have refused the note? WHY should the Skimpole have refused the note? Skimpole protests to Bucket, 'What's this for? I don't understand it, it is of no use to me, take it away.' Bucket still entreats Skimpole to accept it. Are there reasons why Skimpole, not being warped by prejudices, should accept it? Yes. Skimpole perceives them. What are they? Skimpole reasons with himself, this is a tamed lynx, an active police-officer, an intelligent man, a person of a peculiarly directed energy and great subtlety both of conception and execution, who discovers our friends and enemies for us when they run away, recovers our property for us when we are robbed, avenges us comfortably when we are murdered. This active police-officer and intelligent man has acquired, in the exercise of his art, a strong faith in money; he finds it very useful to him, and he makes it very useful to society. Shall I shake that faith in Bucket because I want it myself; shall I deliberately blunt one of Bucket's weapons; shall I positively paralyse Bucket in his next detective operation? And again. If it is blameable in Skimpole to take the note, it is blameable in Bucket to offer the note—much more blameable in Bucket, because he is the knowing man. Now, Skimpole wishes to think well of Bucket; Skimpole deems it essential, in its little place, to the general cohesion of things, that he SHOULD think well of Bucket. The state expressly asks him to trust to Bucket. And he does. And that's all he does!"

I had nothing to offer in reply to this exposition and therefore took my leave. Mr. Skimpole, however, who was in excellent spirits, would not hear of my returning home attended only by "Little Coavinses," and accompanied me himself. He entertained me on the way with a variety of delightful conversation and assured me, at parting, that he should never forget the fine tact with which I had found that out for him about our young friends.

As it so happened that I never saw Mr. Skimpole again, I may at once finish what I know of his history. A coolness arose between him and my guardian, based principally on the foregoing grounds and on his having heartlessly disregarded my guardian's entreaties (as we afterwards learned from Ada) in reference to Richard. His being heavily in my guardian's debt had nothing to do with their separation. He died some five years afterwards and left a diary behind him, with letters and other materials towards his life, which was published and which showed him to have been the victim of a combination on the part of mankind against an amiable child. It was considered very pleasant reading, but I never read more of it myself than the sentence on which I chanced to light on opening the book. It was this: "Jarndyce, in common with most other men I have known, is the incarnation of selfishness."

And now I come to a part of my story touching myself very nearly indeed, and for which I was quite unprepared when the circumstance occurred. Whatever little lingerings may have now and then revived in my mind associated with my poor old face had only revived as belonging to a part of my life that was gone—gone like my infancy or my childhood. I have suppressed none of my many weaknesses on that subject, but have written them as faithfully as my memory has recalled them. And I hope to do, and mean to do, the same down to the last words of these pages, which I see now not so very far before me.

The months were gliding away, and my dear girl, sustained by the hopes she had confided in me, was the same beautiful star in the miserable corner. Richard, more worn and haggard, haunted the court day after day, listlessly sat there the whole day long when he knew there was no remote chance of the suit being mentioned, and became one of the stock sights of the place. I wonder whether any of the gentlemen remembered him as he was when he first went there.

So completely was he absorbed in his fixed idea that he used to avow in his cheerful moments that he should never have breathed the fresh air now "but for Woodcourt." It was only Mr. Woodcourt who could occasionally divert his attention for a few hours at a time and rouse him, even when he sunk into a lethargy of mind and body that alarmed us greatly, and the returns of which became more frequent as the months went on. My dear girl was right in saying that he only pursued his errors the more desperately for

her sake. I have no doubt that his desire to retrieve what he had lost was rendered the more intense by his grief for his young wife, and became like the madness of a gamester.

I was there, as I have mentioned, at all hours. When I was there at night, I generally went home with Charley in a coach; sometimes my guardian would meet me in the neighbourhood, and we would walk home together. One evening he had arranged to meet me at eight o'clock. I could not leave, as I usually did, quite punctually at the time, for I was working for my dear girl and had a few stitches more to do to finish what I was about; but it was within a few minutes of the hour when I bundled up my little work-basket, gave my darling my last kiss for the night, and hurried downstairs. Mr. Woodcourt went with me, as it was dusk.

When we came to the usual place of meeting—it was close by, and Mr. Woodcourt had often accompanied me before—my guardian was not there. We waited half an hour, walking up and down, but there were no signs of him. We agreed that he was either prevented from coming or that he had come and gone away, and Mr. Woodcourt proposed to walk home with me.

It was the first walk we had ever taken together, except that very short one to the usual place of meeting. We spoke of Richard and Ada the whole way. I did not thank him in words for what he had done—my appreciation of it had risen above all words then—but I hoped he might not be without some understanding of what I felt so strongly.

Arriving at home and going upstairs, we found that my guardian was out and that Mrs. Woodcourt was out too. We were in the very same room into which I had brought my blushing girl when her youthful lover, now her so altered husband, was the choice of her young heart, the very same room from which my guardian and I had watched them going away through the sunlight in the fresh bloom of their hope and promise.

We were standing by the opened window looking down into the street when Mr. Woodcourt spoke to me. I learned in a moment that he loved me. I learned in a moment that my scarred face was all unchanged to him. I learned in a moment that what I had thought was pity and compassion was devoted, generous, faithful love. Oh, too late to know it now, too late, too late. That was the first ungrateful thought I had. Too late.

"When I returned," he told me, "when I came back, no richer than when I went away, and found you newly risen from a sick bed, yet so inspired by

sweet consideration for others and so free from a selfish thought—”

“Oh, Mr. Woodcourt, forbear, forbear!” I entreated him. “I do not deserve your high praise. I had many selfish thoughts at that time, many!”

“Heaven knows, beloved of my life,” said he, “that my praise is not a lover’s praise, but the truth. You do not know what all around you see in Esther Summerson, how many hearts she touches and awakens, what sacred admiration and what love she wins.”

“Oh, Mr. Woodcourt,” cried I, “it is a great thing to win love, it is a great thing to win love! I am proud of it, and honoured by it; and the hearing of it causes me to shed these tears of mingled joy and sorrow—joy that I have won it, sorrow that I have not deserved it better; but I am not free to think of yours.”

I said it with a stronger heart, for when he praised me thus and when I heard his voice thrill with his belief that what he said was true, I aspired to be more worthy of it. It was not too late for that. Although I closed this unforeseen page in my life to-night, I could be worthier of it all through my life. And it was a comfort to me, and an impulse to me, and I felt a dignity rise up within me that was derived from him when I thought so.

He broke the silence.

“I should poorly show the trust that I have in the dear one who will evermore be as dear to me as now”—and the deep earnestness with which he said it at once strengthened me and made me weep—“if, after her assurance that she is not free to think of my love, I urged it. Dear Esther, let me only tell you that the fond idea of you which I took abroad was exalted to the heavens when I came home. I have always hoped, in the first hour when I seemed to stand in any ray of good fortune, to tell you this. I have always feared that I should tell it you in vain. My hopes and fears are both fulfilled to-night. I distress you. I have said enough.”

Something seemed to pass into my place that was like the angel he thought me, and I felt so sorrowful for the loss he had sustained! I wished to help him in his trouble, as I had wished to do when he showed that first commiseration for me.

“Dear Mr. Woodcourt,” said I, “before we part to-night, something is left for me to say. I never could say it as I wish—I never shall—but—”

I had to think again of being more deserving of his love and his affliction before I could go on.

“—I am deeply sensible of your generosity, and I shall treasure its remembrance to my dying hour. I know full well how changed I am, I know you are not unacquainted with my history, and I know what a noble love that is which is so faithful. What you have said to me could have affected me so much from no other lips, for there are none that could give it such a value to me. It shall not be lost. It shall make me better.”

He covered his eyes with his hand and turned away his head. How could I ever be worthy of those tears?

“If, in the unchanged intercourse we shall have together—in tending Richard and Ada, and I hope in many happier scenes of life—you ever find anything in me which you can honestly think is better than it used to be, believe that it will have sprung up from to-night and that I shall owe it to you. And never believe, dear dear Mr. Woodcourt, never believe that I forget this night or that while my heart beats it can be insensible to the pride and joy of having been beloved by you.”

He took my hand and kissed it. He was like himself again, and I felt still more encouraged.

“I am induced by what you said just now,” said I, “to hope that you have succeeded in your endeavour.”

“I have,” he answered. “With such help from Mr. Jarndyce as you who know him so well can imagine him to have rendered me, I have succeeded.”

“Heaven bless him for it,” said I, giving him my hand; “and heaven bless you in all you do!”

“I shall do it better for the wish,” he answered; “it will make me enter on these new duties as on another sacred trust from you.”

“Ah! Richard!” I exclaimed involuntarily, “What will he do when you are gone!”

“I am not required to go yet; I would not desert him, dear Miss Summerson, even if I were.”

One other thing I felt it needful to touch upon before he left me. I knew that I should not be worthier of the love I could not take if I reserved it.

“Mr. Woodcourt,” said I, “you will be glad to know from my lips before I say good night that in the future, which is clear and bright before me, I am most happy, most fortunate, have nothing to regret or desire.”

It was indeed a glad hearing to him, he replied.

“From my childhood I have been,” said I, “the object of the untiring

goodness of the best of human beings, to whom I am so bound by every tie of attachment, gratitude, and love, that nothing I could do in the compass of a life could express the feelings of a single day."

"I share those feelings," he returned. "You speak of Mr. Jarndyce."

"You know his virtues well," said I, "but few can know the greatness of his character as I know it. All its highest and best qualities have been revealed to me in nothing more brightly than in the shaping out of that future in which I am so happy. And if your highest homage and respect had not been his already—which I know they are—they would have been his, I think, on this assurance and in the feeling it would have awakened in you towards him for my sake."

He fervently replied that indeed indeed they would have been. I gave him my hand again.

"Good night," I said, "Good-bye."

"The first until we meet to-morrow, the second as a farewell to this theme between us for ever."

"Yes."

"Good night; good-bye."

He left me, and I stood at the dark window watching the street. His love, in all its constancy and generosity, had come so suddenly upon me that he had not left me a minute when my fortitude gave way again and the street was blotted out by my rushing tears.

But they were not tears of regret and sorrow. No. He had called me the beloved of his life and had said I would be evermore as dear to him as I was then, and I felt as if my heart would not hold the triumph of having heard those words. My first wild thought had died away. It was not too late to hear them, for it was not too late to be animated by them to be good, true, grateful, and contented. How easy my path, how much easier than his!

CHAPTER LXII

Another Discovery

I HAD NOT THE courage to see any one that night. I had not even the courage to see myself, for I was afraid that my tears might a little reproach me. I went up to my room in the dark, and prayed in the dark, and lay down in the dark to sleep. I had no need of any light to read my guardian's letter by, for I knew it by heart. I took it from the place where I kept it, and repeated its contents by its own clear light of integrity and love, and went to sleep with it on my pillow.

I was up very early in the morning and called Charley to come for a walk. We bought flowers for the breakfast-table, and came back and arranged them, and were as busy as possible. We were so early that I had a good time still for Charley's lesson before breakfast; Charley (who was not in the least improved in the old defective article of grammar) came through it with great applause; and we were altogether very notable. When my guardian appeared he said, "Why, little woman, you look fresher than your flowers!" And Mrs. Woodcourt repeated and translated a passage from the Mewlinnwillinwodd expressive of my being like a mountain with the sun upon it.

This was all so pleasant that I hope it made me still more like the mountain than I had been before. After breakfast I waited my opportunity and peeped about a little until I saw my guardian in his own room—the room of last night—by himself. Then I made an excuse to go in with my housekeeping keys, shutting the door after me.

"Well, Dame Durden?" said my guardian; the post had brought him several letters, and he was writing. "You want money?"

"No, indeed, I have plenty in hand."

"There never was such a Dame Durden," said my guardian, "for making money last."

He had laid down his pen and leaned back in his chair looking at me. I have often spoken of his bright face, but I thought I had never seen it look

so bright and good. There was a high happiness upon it which made me think, “He has been doing some great kindness this morning.”

“There never was,” said my guardian, musing as he smiled upon me, “such a Dame Durden for making money last.”

He had never yet altered his old manner. I loved it and him so much that when I now went up to him and took my usual chair, which was always put at his side—for sometimes I read to him, and sometimes I talked to him, and sometimes I silently worked by him—I hardly liked to disturb it by laying my hand on his breast. But I found I did not disturb it at all.

“Dear guardian,” said I, “I want to speak to you. Have I been remiss in anything?”

“Remiss in anything, my dear!”

“Have I not been what I have meant to be since—I brought the answer to your letter, guardian?”

“You have been everything I could desire, my love.”

“I am very glad indeed to hear that,” I returned. “You know, you said to me, was this the mistress of Bleak House. And I said, yes.”

“Yes,” said my guardian, nodding his head. He had put his arm about me as if there were something to protect me from and looked in my face, smiling.

“Since then,” said I, “we have never spoken on the subject except once.”

“And then I said Bleak House was thinning fast; and so it was, my dear.”

“And I said,” I timidly reminded him, “but its mistress remained.”

He still held me in the same protecting manner and with the same bright goodness in his face.

“Dear guardian,” said I, “I know how you have felt all that has happened, and how considerate you have been. As so much time has passed, and as you spoke only this morning of my being so well again, perhaps you expect me to renew the subject. Perhaps I ought to do so. I will be the mistress of Bleak House when you please.”

“See,” he returned gaily, “what a sympathy there must be between us! I have had nothing else, poor Rick excepted—it’s a large exception—in my mind. When you came in, I was full of it. When shall we give Bleak House its mistress, little woman?”

“When you please.”

“Next month?”

“Next month, dear guardian.”

“The day on which I take the happiest and best step of my life—the day on which I shall be a man more exulting and more enviable than any other man in the world—the day on which I give Bleak House its little mistress—shall be next month then,” said my guardian.

I put my arms round his neck and kissed him just as I had done on the day when I brought my answer.

A servant came to the door to announce Mr. Bucket, which was quite unnecessary, for Mr. Bucket was already looking in over the servant’s shoulder. “Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Summerson,” said he, rather out of breath, “with all apologies for intruding, WILL you allow me to order up a person that’s on the stairs and that objects to being left there in case of becoming the subject of observations in his absence? Thank you. Be so good as chair that there member in this direction, will you?” said Mr. Bucket, beckoning over the banisters.

This singular request produced an old man in a black skull-cap, unable to walk, who was carried up by a couple of bearers and deposited in the room near the door. Mr. Bucket immediately got rid of the bearers, mysteriously shut the door, and bolted it.

“Now you see, Mr. Jarndyce,” he then began, putting down his hat and opening his subject with a flourish of his well-remembered finger, “you know me, and Miss Summerson knows me. This gentleman likewise knows me, and his name is Smallweed. The discounting line is his line principally, and he’s what you may call a dealer in bills. That’s about what YOU are, you know, ain’t you?” said Mr. Bucket, stopping a little to address the gentleman in question, who was exceedingly suspicious of him.

He seemed about to dispute this designation of himself when he was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

“Now, moral, you know!” said Mr. Bucket, improving the accident. “Don’t you contradict when there ain’t no occasion, and you won’t be took in that way. Now, Mr. Jarndyce, I address myself to you. I’ve been negotiating with this gentleman on behalf of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and one way and another I’ve been in and out and about his premises a deal. His premises are the premises formerly occupied by Krook, marine store dealer—a relation of this gentleman’s that you saw in his lifetime if I don’t mistake?”

My guardian replied, “Yes.”

“Well! You are to understand,” said Mr. Bucket, “that this gentleman he come into Krook’s property, and a good deal of magpie property there was. Vast lots of waste-paper among the rest. Lord bless you, of no use to nobody!”

The cunning of Mr. Bucket’s eye and the masterly manner in which he contrived, without a look or a word against which his watchful auditor could protest, to let us know that he stated the case according to previous agreement and could say much more of Mr. Smallweed if he thought it advisable, deprived us of any merit in quite understanding him. His difficulty was increased by Mr. Smallweed’s being deaf as well as suspicious and watching his face with the closest attention.

“Among them odd heaps of old papers, this gentleman, when he comes into the property, naturally begins to rummage, don’t you see?” said Mr. Bucket.

“To which? Say that again,” cried Mr. Smallweed in a shrill, sharp voice.

“To rummage,” repeated Mr. Bucket. “Being a prudent man and accustomed to take care of your own affairs, you begin to rummage among the papers as you have come into; don’t you?”

“Of course I do,” cried Mr. Smallweed.

“Of course you do,” said Mr. Bucket conversationally, “and much to blame you would be if you didn’t. And so you chance to find, you know,” Mr. Bucket went on, stooping over him with an air of cheerful raillery which Mr. Smallweed by no means reciprocated, “and so you chance to find, you know, a paper with the signature of Jarndyce to it. Don’t you?”

Mr. Smallweed glanced with a troubled eye at us and grudgingly nodded assent.

“And coming to look at that paper at your full leisure and convenience—all in good time, for you’re not curious to read it, and why should you be?—what do you find it to be but a will, you see. That’s the drollery of it,” said Mr. Bucket with the same lively air of recalling a joke for the enjoyment of Mr. Smallweed, who still had the same crest-fallen appearance of not enjoying it at all; “what do you find it to be but a will?”

“I don’t know that it’s good as a will or as anything else,” snarled Mr. Smallweed.

Mr. Bucket eyed the old man for a moment—he had slipped and shrunk

down in his chair into a mere bundle—as if he were much disposed to pounce upon him; nevertheless, he continued to bend over him with the same agreeable air, keeping the corner of one of his eyes upon us.

"Notwithstanding which," said Mr. Bucket, "you get a little doubtful and uncomfortable in your mind about it, having a very tender mind of your own."

"Eh? What do you say I have got of my own?" asked Mr. Smallweed with his hand to his ear.

"A very tender mind."

"Ho! Well, go on," said Mr. Smallweed.

"And as you've heard a good deal mentioned regarding a celebrated Chancery will case of the same name, and as you know what a card Krook was for buying all manner of old pieces of furniter, and books, and papers, and what not, and never liking to part with 'em, and always a-going to teach himself to read, you begin to think—and you never was more correct in your born days—'Ecod, if I don't look about me, I may get into trouble regarding this will.'"

"Now, mind how you put it, Bucket," cried the old man anxiously with his hand at his ear. "Speak up; none of your brimstone tricks. Pick me up; I want to hear better. Oh, Lord, I am shaken to bits!"

Mr. Bucket had certainly picked him up at a dart. However, as soon as he could be heard through Mr. Smallweed's coughing and his vicious ejaculations of "Oh, my bones! Oh, dear! I've no breath in my body! I'm worse than the chattering, clattering, brimstone pig at home!" Mr. Bucket proceeded in the same convivial manner as before.

"So, as I happen to be in the habit of coming about your premises, you take me into your confidence, don't you?"

I think it would be impossible to make an admission with more ill will and a worse grace than Mr. Smallweed displayed when he admitted this, rendering it perfectly evident that Mr. Bucket was the very last person he would have thought of taking into his confidence if he could by any possibility have kept him out of it.

"And I go into the business with you—very pleasant we are over it; and I confirm you in your well-founded fears that you will get yourself into a most precious line if you don't come out with that there will," said Mr. Bucket emphatically; "and accordingly you arrange with me that it shall be

delivered up to this present Mr. Jarndyce, on no conditions. If it should prove to be valuable, you trusting yourself to him for your reward; that's about where it is, ain't it?"

"That's what was agreed," Mr. Smallweed assented with the same bad grace.

"In consequence of which," said Mr. Bucket, dismissing his agreeable manner all at once and becoming strictly business-like, "you've got that will upon your person at the present time, and the only thing that remains for you to do is just to out with it!"

Having given us one glance out of the watching corner of his eye, and having given his nose one triumphant rub with his forefinger, Mr. Bucket stood with his eyes fastened on his confidential friend and his hand stretched forth ready to take the paper and present it to my guardian. It was not produced without much reluctance and many declarations on the part of Mr. Smallweed that he was a poor industrious man and that he left it to Mr. Jarndyce's honour not to let him lose by his honesty. Little by little he very slowly took from a breast-pocket a stained, discoloured paper which was much singed upon the outside and a little burnt at the edges, as if it had long ago been thrown upon a fire and hastily snatched off again. Mr. Bucket lost no time in transferring this paper, with the dexterity of a conjuror, from Mr. Smallweed to Mr. Jarndyce. As he gave it to my guardian, he whispered behind his fingers, "Hadn't settled how to make their market of it. Quarrelled and hinted about it. I laid out twenty pound upon it. First the avaricious grandchildren split upon him on account of their objections to his living so unreasonably long, and then they split on one another. Lord! There ain't one of the family that wouldn't sell the other for a pound or two, except the old lady—and she's only out of it because she's too weak in her mind to drive a bargain."

"Mr Bucket," said my guardian aloud, "whatever the worth of this paper may be to any one, my obligations are great to you; and if it be of any worth, I hold myself bound to see Mr. Smallweed remunerated accordingly."

"Not according to your merits, you know," said Mr. Bucket in friendly explanation to Mr. Smallweed. "Don't you be afraid of that. According to its value."

"That is what I mean," said my guardian. "You may observe, Mr.

Bucket, that I abstain from examining this paper myself. The plain truth is, I have forsworn and abjured the whole business these many years, and my soul is sick of it. But Miss Summerson and I will immediately place the paper in the hands of my solicitor in the cause, and its existence shall be made known without delay to all other parties interested."

"Mr. Jarndyce can't say fairer than that, you understand," observed Mr. Bucket to his fellow-visitor. "And it being now made clear to you that nobody's a-going to be wronged—which must be a great relief to YOUR mind—we may proceed with the ceremony of chairing you home again."

He unbolted the door, called in the bearers, wished us good morning, and with a look full of meaning and a crook of his finger at parting went his way.

We went our way too, which was to Lincoln's Inn, as quickly as possible. Mr. Kenge was disengaged, and we found him at his table in his dusty room with the inexpressive-looking books and the piles of papers. Chairs having been placed for us by Mr. Guppy, Mr. Kenge expressed the surprise and gratification he felt at the unusual sight of Mr. Jarndyce in his office. He turned over his double eye-glass as he spoke and was more Conversation Kenge than ever.

"I hope," said Mr. Kenge, "that the genial influence of Miss Summerson," he bowed to me, "may have induced Mr. Jarndyce," he bowed to him, "to forego some little of his animosity towards a cause and towards a court which are—shall I say, which take their place in the stately vista of the pillars of our profession?"

"I am inclined to think," returned my guardian, "that Miss Summerson has seen too much of the effects of the court and the cause to exert any influence in their favour. Nevertheless, they are a part of the occasion of my being here. Mr. Kenge, before I lay this paper on your desk and have done with it, let me tell you how it has come into my hands."

He did so shortly and distinctly.

"It could not, sir," said Mr. Kenge, "have been stated more plainly and to the purpose if it had been a case at law."

"Did you ever know English law, or equity either, plain and to the purpose?" said my guardian.

"Oh, fie!" said Mr. Kenge.

At first he had not seemed to attach much importance to the paper, but

when he saw it he appeared more interested, and when he had opened and read a little of it through his eye-glass, he became amazed. “Mr. Jarndyce,” he said, looking off it, “you have perused this?”

“Not I!” returned my guardian.

“But, my dear sir,” said Mr. Kenge, “it is a will of later date than any in the suit. It appears to be all in the testator’s handwriting. It is duly executed and attested. And even if intended to be cancelled, as might possibly be supposed to be denoted by these marks of fire, it is NOT cancelled. Here it is, a perfect instrument!”

“Well!” said my guardian. “What is that to me?”

“Mr. Guppy!” cried Mr. Kenge, raising his voice. “I beg your pardon, Mr. Jarndyce.”

“Sir.”

“Mr. Vholes of Symond’s Inn. My compliments. Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Glad to speak with him.”

Mr. Guppy disappeared.

“You ask me what is this to you, Mr. Jarndyce. If you had perused this document, you would have seen that it reduces your interest considerably, though still leaving it a very handsome one, still leaving it a very handsome one,” said Mr. Kenge, waving his hand persuasively and blandly. “You would further have seen that the interests of Mr. Richard Carstone and of Miss Ada Clare, now Mrs. Richard Carstone, are very materially advanced by it.”

“Kenge,” said my guardian, “if all the flourishing wealth that the suit brought into this vile court of Chancery could fall to my two young cousins, I should be well contented. But do you ask ME to believe that any good is to come of Jarndyce and Jarndyce?”

“Oh, really, Mr. Jarndyce! Prejudice, prejudice. My dear sir, this is a very great country, a very great country. Its system of equity is a very great system, a very great system. Really, really!”

My guardian said no more, and Mr. Vholes arrived. He was modestly impressed by Mr. Kenge’s professional eminence.

“How do you do, Mr. Vholes? Will you be so good as to take a chair here by me and look over this paper?”

Mr. Vholes did as he was asked and seemed to read it every word. He was not excited by it, but he was not excited by anything. When he had well

examined it, he retired with Mr. Kenge into a window, and shading his mouth with his black glove, spoke to him at some length. I was not surprised to observe Mr. Kenge inclined to dispute what he said before he had said much, for I knew that no two people ever did agree about anything in Jarndyce and Jarndyce. But he seemed to get the better of Mr. Kenge too in a conversation that sounded as if it were almost composed of the words "Receiver-General," "Accountant-General," "report," "estate," and "costs." When they had finished, they came back to Mr. Kenge's table and spoke aloud.

"Well! But this is a very remarkable document, Mr. Vholes," said Mr. Kenge.

Mr. Vholes said, "Very much so."

"And a very important document, Mr. Vholes," said Mr. Kenge.

Again Mr. Vholes said, "Very much so."

"And as you say, Mr. Vholes, when the cause is in the paper next term, this document will be an unexpected and interesting feature in it," said Mr. Kenge, looking loftily at my guardian.

Mr. Vholes was gratified, as a smaller practitioner striving to keep respectable, to be confirmed in any opinion of his own by such an authority.

"And when," asked my guardian, rising after a pause, during which Mr. Kenge had rattled his money and Mr. Vholes had picked his pimples, "when is next term?"

"Next term, Mr. Jarndyce, will be next month," said Mr. Kenge. "Of course we shall at once proceed to do what is necessary with this document and to collect the necessary evidence concerning it; and of course you will receive our usual notification of the cause being in the paper."

"To which I shall pay, of course, my usual attention."

"Still bent, my dear sir," said Mr. Kenge, showing us through the outer office to the door, "still bent, even with your enlarged mind, on echoing a popular prejudice? We are a prosperous community, Mr. Jarndyce, a very prosperous community. We are a great country, Mr. Jarndyce, we are a very great country. This is a great system, Mr. Jarndyce, and would you wish a great country to have a little system? Now, really, really!"

He said this at the stair-head, gently moving his right hand as if it were a silver trowel with which to spread the cement of his words on the structure of the system and consolidate it for a thousand ages.

CHAPTER LXIII

Steel and Iron

GEORGE'S SHOOTING GALLERY IS to let, and the stock is sold off, and George himself is at Chesney Wold attending on Sir Leicester in his rides and riding very near his bridle-rein because of the uncertain hand with which he guides his horse. But not to-day is George so occupied. He is journeying to-day into the iron country farther north to look about him.

As he comes into the iron country farther north, such fresh green woods as those of Chesney Wold are left behind; and coal pits and ashes, high chimneys and red bricks, blighted verdure, scorching fires, and a heavy never-lightening cloud of smoke become the features of the scenery. Among such objects rides the trooper, looking about him and always looking for something he has come to find.

At last, on the black canal bridge of a busy town, with a clang of iron in it, and more fires and more smoke than he has seen yet, the trooper, swart with the dust of the coal roads, checks his horse and asks a workman does he know the name of Rouncewell thereabouts.

"Why, master," quoth the workman, "do I know my own name?"

"'Tis so well known here, is it, comrade?" asks the trooper.

"Rouncewell's? Ah! You're right."

"And where might it be now?" asks the trooper with a glance before him.

"The bank, the factory, or the house?" the workman wants to know.

"Hum! Rouncewell's is so great apparently," mutters the trooper, stroking his chin, "that I have as good as half a mind to go back again. Why, I don't know which I want. Should I find Mr. Rouncewell at the factory, do you think?"

"Tain't easy to say where you'd find him—at this time of the day you might find either him or his son there, if he's in town; but his contracts take him away."

And which is the factory? Why, he sees those chimneys—the tallest ones! Yes, he sees THEM. Well! Let him keep his eye on those chimneys,

going on as straight as ever he can, and presently he'll see 'em down a turning on the left, shut in by a great brick wall which forms one side of the street. That's Rouncewell's.

The trooper thanks his informant and rides slowly on, looking about him. He does not turn back, but puts up his horse (and is much disposed to groom him too) at a public-house where some of Rouncewell's hands are dining, as the ostler tells him. Some of Rouncewell's hands have just knocked off for dinner-time and seem to be invading the whole town. They are very sinewy and strong, are Rouncewell's hands—a little sooty too.

He comes to a gateway in the brick wall, looks in, and sees a great perplexity of iron lying about in every stage and in a vast variety of shapes—in bars, in wedges, in sheets; in tanks, in boilers, in axles, in wheels, in cogs, in cranks, in rails; twisted and wrenched into eccentric and perverse forms as separate parts of machinery; mountains of it broken up, and rusty in its age; distant furnaces of it glowing and bubbling in its youth; bright fireworks of it showering about under the blows of the steam-hammer; red-hot iron, white-hot iron, cold-black iron; an iron taste, an iron smell, and a Babel of iron sounds.

"This is a place to make a man's head ache too!" says the trooper, looking about him for a counting-house. "Who comes here? This is very like me before I was set up. This ought to be my nephew, if likenesses run in families. Your servant, sir."

"Yours, sir. Are you looking for any one?"

"Excuse me. Young Mr. Rouncewell, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I was looking for your father, sir. I wish to have a word with him."

The young man, telling him he is fortunate in his choice of a time, for his father is there, leads the way to the office where he is to be found. "Very like me before I was set up—devilish like me!" thinks the trooper as he follows. They come to a building in the yard with an office on an upper floor. At sight of the gentleman in the office, Mr. George turns very red.

"What name shall I say to my father?" asks the young man.

George, full of the idea of iron, in desperation answers "Steel," and is so presented. He is left alone with the gentleman in the office, who sits at a table with account-books before him and some sheets of paper blotted with hosts of figures and drawings of cunning shapes. It is a bare office, with

bare windows, looking on the iron view below. Tumbled together on the table are some pieces of iron, purposely broken to be tested at various periods of their service, in various capacities. There is iron-dust on everything; and the smoke is seen through the windows rolling heavily out of the tall chimneys to mingle with the smoke from a vaporous Babylon of other chimneys.

“I am at your service, Mr. Steel,” says the gentleman when his visitor has taken a rusty chair.

“Well, Mr. Rouncewell,” George replies, leaning forward with his left arm on his knee and his hat in his hand, and very chary of meeting his brother’s eye, “I am not without my expectations that in the present visit I may prove to be more free than welcome. I have served as a dragoon in my day, and a comrade of mine that I was once rather partial to was, if I don’t deceive myself, a brother of yours. I believe you had a brother who gave his family some trouble, and ran away, and never did any good but in keeping away?”

“Are you quite sure,” returns the ironmaster in an altered voice, “that your name is Steel?”

The trooper falters and looks at him. His brother starts up, calls him by his name, and grasps him by both hands.

“You are too quick for me!” cries the trooper with the tears springing out of his eyes. “How do you do, my dear old fellow? I never could have thought you would have been half so glad to see me as all this. How do you do, my dear old fellow, how do you do!”

They shake hands and embrace each other over and over again, the trooper still coupling his “How do you do, my dear old fellow!” with his protestation that he never thought his brother would have been half so glad to see him as all this!

“So far from it,” he declares at the end of a full account of what has preceded his arrival there, “I had very little idea of making myself known. I thought if you took by any means forgivingly to my name I might gradually get myself up to the point of writing a letter. But I should not have been surprised, brother, if you had considered it anything but welcome news to hear of me.”

“We will show you at home what kind of news we think it, George,” returns his brother. “This is a great day at home, and you could not have

arrived, you bronzed old soldier, on a better. I make an agreement with my son Watt to-day that on this day twelvemonth he shall marry as pretty and as good a girl as you have seen in all your travels. She goes to Germany to-morrow with one of your nieces for a little polishing up in her education. We make a feast of the event, and you will be made the hero of it."

Mr. George is so entirely overcome at first by this prospect that he resists the proposed honour with great earnestness. Being overborne, however, by his brother and his nephew—concerning whom he renews his protestations that he never could have thought they would have been half so glad to see him—he is taken home to an elegant house in all the arrangements of which there is to be observed a pleasant mixture of the originally simple habits of the father and mother with such as are suited to their altered station and the higher fortunes of their children. Here Mr. George is much dismayed by the graces and accomplishments of his nieces that are and by the beauty of Rosa, his niece that is to be, and by the affectionate salutations of these young ladies, which he receives in a sort of dream. He is sorely taken aback, too, by the dutiful behaviour of his nephew and has a woeful consciousness upon him of being a scapegrace. However, there is great rejoicing and a very hearty company and infinite enjoyment, and Mr. George comes bluff and martial through it all, and his pledge to be present at the marriage and give away the bride is received with universal favour. A whirling head has Mr. George that night when he lies down in the state-bed of his brother's house to think of all these things and to see the images of his nieces (awful all the evening in their floating muslins) waltzing, after the German manner, over his counterpane.

The brothers are closeted next morning in the ironmaster's room, where the elder is proceeding, in his clear sensible way, to show how he thinks he may best dispose of George in his business, when George squeezes his hand and stops him.

"Brother, I thank you a million times for your more than brotherly welcome, and a million times more to that for your more than brotherly intentions. But my plans are made. Before I say a word as to them, I wish to consult you upon one family point. How," says the trooper, folding his arms and looking with indomitable firmness at his brother, "how is my mother to be got to scratch me?"

"I am not sure that I understand you, George," replies the ironmaster.

“I say, brother, how is my mother to be got to scratch me? She must be got to do it somehow.”

“Scratch you out of her will, I think you mean?”

“Of course I do. In short,” says the trooper, folding his arms more resolutely yet, “I mean—TO—scratch me!”

“My dear George,” returns his brother, “is it so indispensable that you should undergo that process?”

“Quite! Absolutely! I couldn’t be guilty of the meanness of coming back without it. I should never be safe not to be off again. I have not sneaked home to rob your children, if not yourself, brother, of your rights. I, who forfeited mine long ago! If I am to remain and hold up my head, I must be scratched. Come. You are a man of celebrated penetration and intelligence, and you can tell me how it’s to be brought about.”

“I can tell you, George,” replies the ironmaster deliberately, “how it is not to be brought about, which I hope may answer the purpose as well. Look at our mother, think of her, recall her emotion when she recovered you. Do you believe there is a consideration in the world that would induce her to take such a step against her favourite son? Do you believe there is any chance of her consent, to balance against the outrage it would be to her (loving dear old lady!) to propose it? If you do, you are wrong. No, George! You must make up your mind to remain UNscratched, I think.” There is an amused smile on the ironmaster’s face as he watches his brother, who is pondering, deeply disappointed. “I think you may manage almost as well as if the thing were done, though.”

“How, brother?”

“Being bent upon it, you can dispose by will of anything you have the misfortune to inherit in any way you like, you know.”

“That’s true!” says the trooper, pondering again. Then he wistfully asks, with his hand on his brother’s, “Would you mind mentioning that, brother, to your wife and family?”

“Not at all.”

“Thank you. You wouldn’t object to say, perhaps, that although an undoubted vagabond, I am a vagabond of the harum-scarum order, and not of the mean sort?”

The ironmaster, repressing his amused smile, assents.

“Thank you. Thank you. It’s a weight off my mind,” says the trooper

with a heave of his chest as he unfolds his arms and puts a hand on each leg, “though I had set my heart on being scratched, too!”

The brothers are very like each other, sitting face to face; but a certain massive simplicity and absence of usage in the ways of the world is all on the trooper’s side.

“Well,” he proceeds, throwing off his disappointment, “next and last, those plans of mine. You have been so brotherly as to propose to me to fall in here and take my place among the products of your perseverance and sense. I thank you heartily. It’s more than brotherly, as I said before, and I thank you heartily for it,” shaking him a long time by the hand. “But the truth is, brother, I am a—I am a kind of a weed, and it’s too late to plant me in a regular garden.”

“My dear George,” returns the elder, concentrating his strong steady brow upon him and smiling confidently, “leave that to me, and let me try.”

George shakes his head. “You could do it, I have not a doubt, if anybody could; but it’s not to be done. Not to be done, sir! Whereas it so falls out, on the other hand, that I am able to be of some trifle of use to Sir Leicester Dedlock since his illness—brought on by family sorrows—and that he would rather have that help from our mother’s son than from anybody else.”

“Well, my dear George,” returns the other with a very slight shade upon his open face, “if you prefer to serve in Sir Leicester Dedlock’s household brigade—”

“There it is, brother,” cries the trooper, checking him, with his hand upon his knee again; “there it is! You don’t take kindly to that idea; I don’t mind it. You are not used to being officered; I am. Everything about you is in perfect order and discipline; everything about me requires to be kept so. We are not accustomed to carry things with the same hand or to look at ’em from the same point. I don’t say much about my garrison manners because I found myself pretty well at my ease last night, and they wouldn’t be noticed here, I dare say, once and away. But I shall get on best at Chesney Wold, where there’s more room for a weed than there is here; and the dear old lady will be made happy besides. Therefore I accept of Sir Leicester Dedlock’s proposals. When I come over next year to give away the bride, or whenever I come, I shall have the sense to keep the household brigade in ambuscade and not to manoeuvre it on your ground. I thank you heartily again and am proud to think of the Rouncewells as they’ll be founded by you.”

“You know yourself, George,” says the elder brother, returning the grip of his hand, “and perhaps you know me better than I know myself. Take your way. So that we don’t quite lose one another again, take your way.”

“No fear of that!” returns the trooper. “Now, before I turn my horse’s head homewards, brother, I will ask you—if you’ll be so good—to look over a letter for me. I brought it with me to send from these parts, as Chesney Wold might be a painful name just now to the person it’s written to. I am not much accustomed to correspondence myself, and I am particular respecting this present letter because I want it to be both straightforward and delicate.”

Herewith he hands a letter, closely written in somewhat pale ink but in a neat round hand, to the ironmaster, who reads as follows:

> Miss Esther Summerson,
>
> A communication having been made to me by Inspector Bucket of a letter to myself being found among the papers of a certain person, I take the liberty to make known to you that it was but a few lines of instruction from abroad, when, where, and how to deliver an enclosed letter to a young and beautiful lady, then unmarried, in England. I duly observed the same.
>
> I further take the liberty to make known to you that it was got from me as a proof of handwriting only and that otherwise I would not have given it up, as appearing to be the most harmless in my possession, without being previously shot through the heart.
>
> I further take the liberty to mention that if I could have supposed a certain unfortunate gentleman to have been in existence, I never could and never would have rested until I had discovered his retreat and shared my last farthing with him, as my duty and my inclination would have equally been. But he was (officially) reported drowned, and assuredly went over the side of a transport-ship at night in an Irish harbour within a few hours of her arrival from the West Indies, as I have myself heard both from officers and men on board, and know to have been (officially) confirmed.
>
> I further take the liberty to state that in my humble quality as one of the

rank and file, I am, and shall ever continue to be, your thoroughly devoted and admiring servant and that I esteem the qualities you possess above all others far beyond the limits of the present dispatch.

I have the honour to be,

George

"A little formal," observes the elder brother, refolding it with a puzzled face.

"But nothing that might not be sent to a pattern young lady?" asks the younger.

"Nothing at all."

Therefore it is sealed and deposited for posting among the iron correspondence of the day. This done, Mr. George takes a hearty farewell of the family party and prepares to saddle and mount. His brother, however, unwilling to part with him so soon, proposes to ride with him in a light open carriage to the place where he will bait for the night, and there remain with him until morning, a servant riding for so much of the journey on the thoroughbred old grey from Chesney Wold. The offer, being gladly accepted, is followed by a pleasant ride, a pleasant dinner, and a pleasant breakfast, all in brotherly communion. Then they once more shake hands long and heartily and part, the ironmaster turning his face to the smoke and fires, and the trooper to the green country. Early in the afternoon the subdued sound of his heavy military trot is heard on the turf in the avenue as he rides on with imaginary clank and jingle of accoutrements under the old elm-trees.

CHAPTER LXIV

Esther’s Narrative

SOON AFTER I HAD that conversation with my guardian, he put a sealed paper in my hand one morning and said, “This is for next month, my dear.” I found in it two hundred pounds.

I now began very quietly to make such preparations as I thought were necessary. Regulating my purchases by my guardian’s taste, which I knew very well of course, I arranged my wardrobe to please him and hoped I should be highly successful. I did it all so quietly because I was not quite free from my old apprehension that Ada would be rather sorry and because my guardian was so quiet himself. I had no doubt that under all the circumstances we should be married in the most private and simple manner. Perhaps I should only have to say to Ada, “Would you like to come and see me married to-morrow, my pet?” Perhaps our wedding might even be as unpretending as her own, and I might not find it necessary to say anything about it until it was over. I thought that if I were to choose, I would like this best.

The only exception I made was Mrs. Woodcourt. I told her that I was going to be married to my guardian and that we had been engaged some time. She highly approved. She could never do enough for me and was remarkably softened now in comparison with what she had been when we first knew her. There was no trouble she would not have taken to have been of use to me, but I need hardly say that I only allowed her to take as little as gratified her kindness without tasking it.

Of course this was not a time to neglect my guardian, and of course it was not a time for neglecting my darling. So I had plenty of occupation, which I was glad of; and as to Charley, she was absolutely not to be seen for needlework. To surround herself with great heaps of it—baskets full and tables full—and do a little, and spend a great deal of time in staring with her round eyes at what there was to do, and persuade herself that she was going to do it, were Charley’s great dignities and delights.

Meanwhile, I must say, I could not agree with my guardian on the subject of the will, and I had some sanguine hopes of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Which of us was right will soon appear, but I certainly did encourage expectations. In Richard, the discovery gave occasion for a burst of business and agitation that buoyed him up for a little time, but he had lost the elasticity even of hope now and seemed to me to retain only its feverish anxieties. From something my guardian said one day when we were talking about this, I understood that my marriage would not take place until after the term-time we had been told to look forward to; and I thought the more, for that, how rejoiced I should be if I could be married when Richard and Ada were a little more prosperous.

The term was very near indeed when my guardian was called out of town and went down into Yorkshire on Mr. Woodcourt's business. He had told me beforehand that his presence there would be necessary. I had just come in one night from my dear girl's and was sitting in the midst of all my new clothes, looking at them all around me and thinking, when a letter from my guardian was brought to me. It asked me to join him in the country and mentioned by what stage-coach my place was taken and at what time in the morning I should have to leave town. It added in a postscript that I would not be many hours from Ada.

I expected few things less than a journey at that time, but I was ready for it in half an hour and set off as appointed early next morning. I travelled all day, wondering all day what I could be wanted for at such a distance; now I thought it might be for this purpose, and now I thought it might be for that purpose, but I was never, never, never near the truth.

It was night when I came to my journey's end and found my guardian waiting for me. This was a great relief, for towards evening I had begun to fear (the more so as his letter was a very short one) that he might be ill. However, there he was, as well as it was possible to be; and when I saw his genial face again at its brightest and best, I said to myself, he has been doing some other great kindness. Not that it required much penetration to say that, because I knew that his being there at all was an act of kindness.

Supper was ready at the hotel, and when we were alone at table he said, "Full of curiosity, no doubt, little woman, to know why I have brought you here?"

"Well, guardian," said I, "without thinking myself a Fatima or you a

Blue Beard, I am a little curious about it."

"Then to ensure your night's rest, my love," he returned gaily, "I won't wait until to-morrow to tell you. I have very much wished to express to Woodcourt, somehow, my sense of his humanity to poor unfortunate Jo, his inestimable services to my young cousins, and his value to us all. When it was decided that he should settle here, it came into my head that I might ask his acceptance of some unpretending and suitable little place to lay his own head in. I therefore caused such a place to be looked out for, and such a place was found on very easy terms, and I have been touching it up for him and making it habitable. However, when I walked over it the day before yesterday and it was reported ready, I found that I was not housekeeper enough to know whether things were all as they ought to be. So I sent off for the best little housekeeper that could possibly be got to come and give me her advice and opinion. And here she is," said my guardian, "laughing and crying both together!"

Because he was so dear, so good, so admirable. I tried to tell him what I thought of him, but I could not articulate a word.

"Tut, tut!" said my guardian. "You make too much of it, little woman. Why, how you sob, Dame Durden, how you sob!"

"It is with exquisite pleasure, guardian—with a heart full of thanks."

"Well, well," said he. "I am delighted that you approve. I thought you would. I meant it as a pleasant surprise for the little mistress of Bleak House."

I kissed him and dried my eyes. "I know now!" said I. "I have seen this in your face a long while."

"No; have you really, my dear?" said he. "What a Dame Durden it is to read a face!"

He was so quaintly cheerful that I could not long be otherwise, and was almost ashamed of having been otherwise at all. When I went to bed, I cried. I am bound to confess that I cried; but I hope it was with pleasure, though I am not quite sure it was with pleasure. I repeated every word of the letter twice over.

A most beautiful summer morning succeeded, and after breakfast we went out arm in arm to see the house of which I was to give my mighty housekeeping opinion. We entered a flower-garden by a gate in a side wall, of which he had the key, and the first thing I saw was that the beds and

flowers were all laid out according to the manner of my beds and flowers at home.

"You see, my dear," observed my guardian, standing still with a delighted face to watch my looks, "knowing there could be no better plan, I borrowed yours."

We went on by a pretty little orchard, where the cherries were nestling among the green leaves and the shadows of the apple-trees were sporting on the grass, to the house itself—a cottage, quite a rustic cottage of doll's rooms; but such a lovely place, so tranquil and so beautiful, with such a rich and smiling country spread around it; with water sparkling away into the distance, here all overhung with summer-growth, there turning a humming mill; at its nearest point glancing through a meadow by the cheerful town, where cricket-players were assembling in bright groups and a flag was flying from a white tent that rippled in the sweet west wind. And still, as we went through the pretty rooms, out at the little rustic verandah doors, and underneath the tiny wooden colonnades garlanded with woodbine, jasmine, and honey-suckle, I saw in the papering on the walls, in the colours of the furniture, in the arrangement of all the pretty objects, MY little tastes and fancies, MY little methods and inventions which they used to laugh at while they praised them, my odd ways everywhere.

I could not say enough in admiration of what was all so beautiful, but one secret doubt arose in my mind when I saw this, I thought, oh, would he be the happier for it! Would it not have been better for his peace that I should not have been so brought before him? Because although I was not what he thought me, still he loved me very dearly, and it might remind him mournfully of what be believed he had lost. I did not wish him to forget me —perhaps he might not have done so, without these aids to his memory— but my way was easier than his, and I could have reconciled myself even to that so that he had been the happier for it.

"And now, little woman," said my guardian, whom I had never seen so proud and joyful as in showing me these things and watching my appreciation of them, "now, last of all, for the name of this house."

"What is it called, dear guardian?"

"My child," said he, "come and see,"

He took me to the porch, which he had hitherto avoided, and said, pausing before we went out, "My dear child, don't you guess the name?"

“No!” said I.

We went out of the porch and he showed me written over it, Bleak House.

He led me to a seat among the leaves close by, and sitting down beside me and taking my hand in his, spoke to me thus, “My darling girl, in what there has been between us, I have, I hope, been really solicitous for your happiness. When I wrote you the letter to which you brought the answer,” smiling as he referred to it, “I had my own too much in view; but I had yours too. Whether, under different circumstances, I might ever have renewed the old dream I sometimes dreamed when you were very young, of making you my wife one day, I need not ask myself. I did renew it, and I wrote my letter, and you brought your answer. You are following what I say, my child?”

I was cold, and I trembled violently, but not a word he uttered was lost. As I sat looking fixedly at him and the sun’s rays descended, softly shining through the leaves upon his bare head, I felt as if the brightness on him must be like the brightness of the angels.

“Hear me, my love, but do not speak. It is for me to speak now. When it was that I began to doubt whether what I had done would really make you happy is no matter. Woodcourt came home, and I soon had no doubt at all.”

I clasped him round the neck and hung my head upon his breast and wept. “Lie lightly, confidently here, my child,” said he, pressing me gently to him. “I am your guardian and your father now. Rest confidently here.”

Soothingly, like the gentle rustling of the leaves; and genially, like the ripening weather; and radiantly and beneficently, like the sunshine, he went on.

“Understand me, my dear girl. I had no doubt of your being contented and happy with me, being so dutiful and so devoted; but I saw with whom you would be happier. That I penetrated his secret when Dame Durden was blind to it is no wonder, for I knew the good that could never change in her better far than she did. Well! I have long been in Allan Woodcourt’s confidence, although he was not, until yesterday, a few hours before you came here, in mine. But I would not have my Esther’s bright example lost; I would not have a jot of my dear girl’s virtues unobserved and unhonoured; I would not have her admitted on sufferance into the line of Morgan ap-Kerrig, no, not for the weight in gold of all the mountains in Wales!”

He stopped to kiss me on the forehead, and I sobbed and wept afresh. For I felt as if I could not bear the painful delight of his praise.

"Hush, little woman! Don't cry; this is to be a day of joy. I have looked forward to it," he said exultingly, "for months on months! A few words more, Dame Trot, and I have said my say. Determined not to throw away one atom of my Esther's worth, I took Mrs. Woodcourt into a separate confidence. 'Now, madam,' said I, 'I clearly perceive—and indeed I know, to boot—that your son loves my ward. I am further very sure that my ward loves your son, but will sacrifice her love to a sense of duty and affection, and will sacrifice it so completely, so entirely, so religiously, that you should never suspect it though you watched her night and day.' Then I told her all our story—ours—yours and mine. 'Now, madam,' said I, 'come you, knowing this, and live with us. Come you, and see my child from hour to hour; set what you see against her pedigree, which is this, and this'—for I scorned to mince it—'and tell me what is the true legitimacy when you shall have quite made up your mind on that subject.' Why, honour to her old Welsh blood, my dear," cried my guardian with enthusiasm, "I believe the heart it animates beats no less warmly, no less admiringly, no less lovingly, towards Dame Durden than my own!"

He tenderly raised my head, and as I clung to him, kissed me in his old fatherly way again and again. What a light, now, on the protecting manner I had thought about!

"One more last word. When Allan Woodcourt spoke to you, my dear, he spoke with my knowledge and consent—but I gave him no encouragement, not I, for these surprises were my great reward, and I was too miserly to part with a scrap of it. He was to come and tell me all that passed, and he did. I have no more to say. My dearest, Allan Woodcourt stood beside your father when he lay dead—stood beside your mother. This is Bleak House. This day I give this house its little mistress; and before God, it is the brightest day in all my life!"

He rose and raised me with him. We were no longer alone. My husband—I have called him by that name full seven happy years now—stood at my side.

"Allan," said my guardian, "take from me a willing gift, the best wife that ever man had. What more can I say for you than that I know you deserve her! Take with her the little home she brings you. You know what

she will make it, Allan; you know what she has made its namesake. Let me share its felicity sometimes, and what do I sacrifice? Nothing, nothing."

He kissed me once again, and now the tears were in his eyes as he said more softly, "Esther, my dearest, after so many years, there is a kind of parting in this too. I know that my mistake has caused you some distress. Forgive your old guardian, in restoring him to his old place in your affections; and blot it out of your memory. Allan, take my dear."

He moved away from under the green roof of leaves, and stopping in the sunlight outside and turning cheerfully towards us, said, "I shall be found about here somewhere. It's a west wind, little woman, due west! Let no one thank me any more, for I am going to revert to my bachelor habits, and if anybody disregards this warning, I'll run away and never come back!"

What happiness was ours that day, what joy, what rest, what hope, what gratitude, what bliss! We were to be married before the month was out, but when we were to come and take possession of our own house was to depend on Richard and Ada.

We all three went home together next day. As soon as we arrived in town, Allan went straight to see Richard and to carry our joyful news to him and my darling. Late as it was, I meant to go to her for a few minutes before lying down to sleep, but I went home with my guardian first to make his tea for him and to occupy the old chair by his side, for I did not like to think of its being empty so soon.

When we came home we found that a young man had called three times in the course of that one day to see me and that having been told on the occasion of his third call that I was not expected to return before ten o'clock at night, he had left word that he would call about then. He had left his card three times. Mr. Guppy.

As I naturally speculated on the object of these visits, and as I always associated something ludicrous with the visitor, it fell out that in laughing about Mr. Guppy I told my guardian of his old proposal and his subsequent retraction. "After that," said my guardian, "we will certainly receive this hero." So instructions were given that Mr. Guppy should be shown in when he came again, and they were scarcely given when he did come again.

He was embarrassed when he found my guardian with me, but recovered himself and said, "How de do, sir?"

"How do you do, sir?" returned my guardian.

“Thank you, sir, I am tolerable,” returned Mr. Guppy. “Will you allow me to introduce my mother, Mrs. Guppy of the Old Street Road, and my particular friend, Mr. Weevle. That is to say, my friend has gone by the name of Weevle, but his name is really and truly Jobling.”

My guardian begged them to be seated, and they all sat down.

“Tony,” said Mr. Guppy to his friend after an awkward silence. “Will you open the case?”

“Do it yourself,” returned the friend rather tartly.

“Well, Mr. Jarndyce, sir,” Mr. Guppy, after a moment’s consideration, began, to the great diversion of his mother, which she displayed by nudging Mr. Jobling with her elbow and winking at me in a most remarkable manner, “I had an idea that I should see Miss Summerson by herself and was not quite prepared for your esteemed presence. But Miss Summerson has mentioned to you, perhaps, that something has passed between us on former occasions?”

“Miss Summerson,” returned my guardian, smiling, “has made a communication to that effect to me.”

“That,” said Mr. Guppy, “makes matters easier. Sir, I have come out of my articles at Kenge and Carboy’s, and I believe with satisfaction to all parties. I am now admitted (after undergoing an examination that’s enough to badger a man blue, touching a pack of nonsense that he don’t want to know) on the roll of attorneys and have taken out my certificate, if it would be any satisfaction to you to see it.”

“Thank you, Mr. Guppy,” returned my guardian. “I am quite willing—I believe I use a legal phrase—to admit the certificate.”

Mr. Guppy therefore desisted from taking something out of his pocket and proceeded without it.

“I have no capital myself, but my mother has a little property which takes the form of an annuity”—here Mr. Guppy’s mother rolled her head as if she never could sufficiently enjoy the observation, and put her handkerchief to her mouth, and again winked at me—“and a few pounds for expenses out of pocket in conducting business will never be wanting, free of interest, which is an advantage, you know,” said Mr. Guppy feelingly.

“Certainly an advantage,” returned my guardian.

“I HAVE some connexion,” pursued Mr. Guppy, “and it lays in the direction of Walcot Square, Lambeth. I have therefore taken a ’ouse in that

locality, which, in the opinion of my friends, is a hollow bargain (taxes ridiculous, and use of fixtures included in the rent), and intend setting up professionally for myself there forthwith."

Here Mr. Guppy's mother fell into an extraordinary passion of rolling her head and smiling waggishly at anybody who would look at her.

"It's a six-roomer, exclusive of kitchens," said Mr. Guppy, "and in the opinion of my friends, a commodious tenement. When I mention my friends, I refer principally to my friend Jobling, who I believe has known me," Mr. Guppy looked at him with a sentimental air, "from boyhood's hour."

Mr. Jobling confirmed this with a sliding movement of his legs.

"My friend Jobling will render me his assistance in the capacity of clerk and will live in the 'ouse," said Mr. Guppy. "My mother will likewise live in the 'ouse when her present quarter in the Old Street Road shall have ceased and expired; and consequently there will be no want of society. My friend Jobling is naturally aristocratic by taste, and besides being acquainted with the movements of the upper circles, fully backs me in the intentions I am now developing."

Mr. Jobling said "Certainly" and withdrew a little from the elbow of Mr Guppy's mother.

"Now, I have no occasion to mention to you, sir, you being in the confidence of Miss Summerson," said Mr. Guppy, "(mother, I wish you'd be so good as to keep still), that Miss Summerson's image was formerly imprinted on my 'eart and that I made her a proposal of marriage."

"That I have heard," returned my guardian.

"Circumstances," pursued Mr. Guppy, "over which I had no control, but quite the contrary, weakened the impression of that image for a time. At which time Miss Summerson's conduct was highly genteel; I may even add, magnanimous."

My guardian patted me on the shoulder and seemed much amused.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Guppy, "I have got into that state of mind myself that I wish for a reciprocity of magnanimous behaviour. I wish to prove to Miss Summerson that I can rise to a heighth of which perhaps she hardly thought me capable. I find that the image which I did suppose had been eradicated from my 'eart is NOT eradicated. Its influence over me is still tremenjous, and yielding to it, I am willing to overlook the circumstances

over which none of us have had any control and to renew those proposals to Miss Summerson which I had the honour to make at a former period. I beg to lay the ’ouse in Walcot Square, the business, and myself before Miss Summerson for her acceptance.”

“Very magnanimous indeed, sir,” observed my guardian.

“Well, sir,” replied Mr. Guppy with candour, “my wish is to BE magnanimous. I do not consider that in making this offer to Miss Summerson I am by any means throwing myself away; neither is that the opinion of my friends. Still, there are circumstances which I submit may be taken into account as a set off against any little drawbacks of mine, and so a fair and equitable balance arrived at.”

“I take upon myself, sir,” said my guardian, laughing as he rang the bell, “to reply to your proposals on behalf of Miss Summerson. She is very sensible of your handsome intentions, and wishes you good evening, and wishes you well.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Guppy with a blank look. “Is that tantamount, sir, to acceptance, or rejection, or consideration?”

“To decided rejection, if you please,” returned my guardian.

Mr. Guppy looked incredulously at his friend, and at his mother, who suddenly turned very angry, and at the floor, and at the ceiling.

“Indeed?” said he. “Then, Jobling, if you was the friend you represent yourself, I should think you might hand my mother out of the gangway instead of allowing her to remain where she ain’t wanted.”

But Mrs. Guppy positively refused to come out of the gangway. She wouldn’t hear of it. “Why, get along with you,” said she to my guardian, “what do you mean? Ain’t my son good enough for you? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Get out with you!”

“My good lady,” returned my guardian, “it is hardly reasonable to ask me to get out of my own room.”

“I don’t care for that,” said Mrs. Guppy. “Get out with you. If we ain’t good enough for you, go and procure somebody that is good enough. Go along and find ’em.”

I was quite unprepared for the rapid manner in which Mrs. Guppy’s power of jocularity merged into a power of taking the profoundest offence.

“Go along and find somebody that’s good enough for you,” repeated Mrs. Guppy. “Get out!” Nothing seemed to astonish Mr. Guppy’s mother so

much and to make her so very indignant as our not getting out. “Why don’t you get out?” said Mrs. Guppy. “What are you stopping here for?”

“Mother,” interposed her son, always getting before her and pushing her back with one shoulder as she sidled at my guardian, “WILL you hold your tongue?”

“No, William,” she returned, “I won’t! Not unless he gets out, I won’t!”

However, Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling together closed on Mr. Guppy’s mother (who began to be quite abusive) and took her, very much against her will, downstairs, her voice rising a stair higher every time her figure got a stair lower, and insisting that we should immediately go and find somebody who was good enough for us, and above all things that we should get out.

CHAPTER LXV

Beginning the World

THE TERM HAD COMMENCED, and my guardian found an intimation from Mr. Kenge that the cause would come on in two days. As I had sufficient hopes of the will to be in a flutter about it, Allan and I agreed to go down to the court that morning. Richard was extremely agitated and was so weak and low, though his illness was still of the mind, that my dear girl indeed had sore occasion to be supported. But she looked forward—a very little way now—to the help that was to come to her, and never drooped.

It was at Westminster that the cause was to come on. It had come on there, I dare say, a hundred times before, but I could not divest myself of an idea that it MIGHT lead to some result now. We left home directly after breakfast to be at Westminster Hall in good time and walked down there through the lively streets—so happily and strangely it seemed!—together.

As we were going along, planning what we should do for Richard and Ada, I heard somebody calling “Esther! My dear Esther! Esther!” And there was Caddy Jellyby, with her head out of the window of a little carriage which she hired now to go about in to her pupils (she had so many), as if she wanted to embrace me at a hundred yards’ distance. I had written her a note to tell her of all that my guardian had done, but had not had a moment to go and see her. Of course we turned back, and the affectionate girl was in that state of rapture, and was so overjoyed to talk about the night when she brought me the flowers, and was so determined to squeeze my face (bonnet and all) between her hands, and go on in a wild manner altogether, calling me all kinds of precious names, and telling Allan I had done I don’t know what for her, that I was just obliged to get into the little carriage and calm her down by letting her say and do exactly what she liked. Allan, standing at the window, was as pleased as Caddy; and I was as pleased as either of them; and I wonder that I got away as I did, rather than that I came off laughing, and red, and anything but tidy, and looking after Caddy, who looked after us out of the coach-window as long as she could see us.

This made us some quarter of an hour late, and when we came to Westminster Hall we found that the day's business was begun. Worse than that, we found such an unusual crowd in the Court of Chancery that it was full to the door, and we could neither see nor hear what was passing within. It appeared to be something droll, for occasionally there was a laugh and a cry of "Silence!" It appeared to be something interesting, for every one was pushing and striving to get nearer. It appeared to be something that made the professional gentlemen very merry, for there were several young counsellors in wigs and whiskers on the outside of the crowd, and when one of them told the others about it, they put their hands in their pockets, and quite doubled themselves up with laughter, and went stamping about the pavement of the Hall.

We asked a gentleman by us if he knew what cause was on. He told us Jarndyce and Jarndyce. We asked him if he knew what was doing in it. He said really, no he did not, nobody ever did, but as well as he could make out, it was over. Over for the day? we asked him. No, he said, over for good.

Over for good!

When we heard this unaccountable answer, we looked at one another quite lost in amazement. Could it be possible that the will had set things right at last and that Richard and Ada were going to be rich? It seemed too good to be true. Alas it was!

Our suspense was short, for a break-up soon took place in the crowd, and the people came streaming out looking flushed and hot and bringing a quantity of bad air with them. Still they were all exceedingly amused and were more like people coming out from a farce or a juggler than from a court of justice. We stood aside, watching for any countenance we knew, and presently great bundles of paper began to be carried out—bundles in bags, bundles too large to be got into any bags, immense masses of papers of all shapes and no shapes, which the bearers staggered under, and threw down for the time being, anyhow, on the Hall pavement, while they went back to bring out more. Even these clerks were laughing. We glanced at the papers, and seeing Jarndyce and Jarndyce everywhere, asked an official-looking person who was standing in the midst of them whether the cause was over. Yes, he said, it was all up with it at last, and burst out laughing too.

At this juncture we perceived Mr. Kenge coming out of court with an affable dignity upon him, listening to Mr. Vholes, who was deferential and carried his own bag. Mr. Vholes was the first to see us. “Here is Miss Summerson, sir,” he said. “And Mr. Woodcourt.”

“Oh, indeed! Yes. Truly!” said Mr. Kenge, raising his hat to me with polished politeness. “How do you do? Glad to see you. Mr. Jarndyce is not here?”

No. He never came there, I reminded him.

“Really,” returned Mr. Kenge, “it is as well that he is NOT here to-day, for his—shall I say, in my good friend’s absence, his indomitable singularity of opinion?—might have been strengthened, perhaps; not reasonably, but might have been strengthened.”

“Pray what has been done to-day?” asked Allan.

“I beg your pardon?” said Mr. Kenge with excessive urbanity.

“What has been done to-day?”

“What has been done,” repeated Mr. Kenge. “Quite so. Yes. Why, not much has been done; not much. We have been checked—brought up suddenly, I would say—upon the—shall I term it threshold?”

“Is this will considered a genuine document, sir?” said Allan. “Will you tell us that?”

“Most certainly, if I could,” said Mr. Kenge; “but we have not gone into that, we have not gone into that.”

“We have not gone into that,” repeated Mr. Vholes as if his low inward voice were an echo.

“You are to reflect, Mr. Woodcourt,” observed Mr. Kenge, using his silver trowel persuasively and smoothingly, “that this has been a great cause, that this has been a protracted cause, that this has been a complex cause. Jarndyce and Jarndyce has been termed, not inaptly, a monument of Chancery practice.”

“And patience has sat upon it a long time,” said Allan.

“Very well indeed, sir,” returned Mr. Kenge with a certain condescending laugh he had. “Very well! You are further to reflect, Mr. Woodcourt,” becoming dignified almost to severity, “that on the numerous difficulties, contingencies, masterly fictions, and forms of procedure in this great cause, there has been expended study, ability, eloquence, knowledge, intellect, Mr. Woodcourt, high intellect. For many years, the—a—I would

say the flower of the bar, and the—a—I would presume to add, the matured autumnal fruits of the woolsack—have been lavished upon Jarndyce and Jarndyce. If the public have the benefit, and if the country have the adornment, of this great grasp, it must be paid for in money or money's worth, sir."

"Mr. Kenge," said Allan, appearing enlightened all in a moment. "Excuse me, our time presses. Do I understand that the whole estate is found to have been absorbed in costs?"

"Hem! I believe so," returned Mr. Kenge. "Mr. Vholes, what do YOU say?"

"I believe so," said Mr. Vholes.

"And that thus the suit lapses and melts away?"

"Probably," returned Mr. Kenge. "Mr. Vholes?"

"Probably," said Mr. Vholes.

"My dearest life," whispered Allan, "this will break Richard's heart!"

There was such a shock of apprehension in his face, and he knew Richard so perfectly, and I too had seen so much of his gradual decay, that what my dear girl had said to me in the fullness of her foreboding love sounded like a knell in my ears.

"In case you should be wanting Mr. C., sir," said Mr. Vholes, coming after us, "you'll find him in court. I left him there resting himself a little. Good day, sir; good day, Miss Summerson." As he gave me that slowly devouring look of his, while twisting up the strings of his bag before he hastened with it after Mr. Kenge, the benignant shadow of whose conversational presence he seemed afraid to leave, he gave one gasp as if he had swallowed the last morsel of his client, and his black buttoned-up unwholesome figure glided away to the low door at the end of the Hall.

"My dear love," said Allan, "leave to me, for a little while, the charge you gave me. Go home with this intelligence and come to Ada's by and by!"

I would not let him take me to a coach, but entreated him to go to Richard without a moment's delay and leave me to do as he wished. Hurrying home, I found my guardian and told him gradually with what news I had returned. "Little woman," said he, quite unmoved for himself, "to have done with the suit on any terms is a greater blessing than I had looked for. But my poor young cousins!"

We talked about them all the morning and discussed what it was possible to do. In the afternoon my guardian walked with me to Symond's Inn and left me at the door. I went upstairs. When my darling heard my footsteps, she came out into the small passage and threw her arms round my neck, but she composed herself directly and said that Richard had asked for me several times. Allan had found him sitting in the corner of the court, she told me, like a stone figure. On being roused, he had broken away and made as if he would have spoken in a fierce voice to the judge. He was stopped by his mouth being full of blood, and Allan had brought him home.

He was lying on a sofa with his eyes closed when I went in. There were restoratives on the table; the room was made as airy as possible, and was darkened, and was very orderly and quiet. Allan stood behind him watching him gravely. His face appeared to me to be quite destitute of colour, and now that I saw him without his seeing me, I fully saw, for the first time, how worn away he was. But he looked handsomer than I had seen him look for many a day.

I sat down by his side in silence. Opening his eyes by and by, he said in a weak voice, but with his old smile, "Dame Durden, kiss me, my dear!"

It was a great comfort and surprise to me to find him in his low state cheerful and looking forward. He was happier, he said, in our intended marriage than he could find words to tell me. My husband had been a guardian angel to him and Ada, and he blessed us both and wished us all the joy that life could yield us. I almost felt as if my own heart would have broken when I saw him take my husband's hand and hold it to his breast.

We spoke of the future as much as possible, and he said several times that he must be present at our marriage if he could stand upon his feet. Ada would contrive to take him, somehow, he said. "Yes, surely, dearest Richard!" But as my darling answered him thus hopefully, so serene and beautiful, with the help that was to come to her so near—I knew—I knew!

It was not good for him to talk too much, and when he was silent, we were silent too. Sitting beside him, I made a pretence of working for my dear, as he had always been used to joke about my being busy. Ada leaned upon his pillow, holding his head upon her arm. He dozed often, and whenever he awoke without seeing him, said first of all, "Where is Woodcourt?"

Evening had come on when I lifted up my eyes and saw my guardian

standing in the little hall. “Who is that, Dame Durden?” Richard asked me. The door was behind him, but he had observed in my face that some one was there.

I looked to Allan for advice, and as he nodded “Yes,” bent over Richard and told him. My guardian saw what passed, came softly by me in a moment, and laid his hand on Richard’s. “Oh, sir,” said Richard, “you are a good man, you are a good man!” and burst into tears for the first time.

My guardian, the picture of a good man, sat down in my place, keeping his hand on Richard’s.

“My dear Rick,” said he, “the clouds have cleared away, and it is bright now. We can see now. We were all bewildered, Rick, more or less. What matters! And how are you, my dear boy?”

“I am very weak, sir, but I hope I shall be stronger. I have to begin the world.”

“Aye, truly; well said!” cried my guardian.

“I will not begin it in the old way now,” said Richard with a sad smile. “I have learned a lesson now, sir. It was a hard one, but you shall be assured, indeed, that I have learned it.”

“Well, well,” said my guardian, comforting him; “well, well, well, dear boy!”

“I was thinking, sir,” resumed Richard, “that there is nothing on earth I should so much like to see as their house—Dame Durden’s and Woodcourt’s house. If I could be removed there when I begin to recover my strength, I feel as if I should get well there sooner than anywhere.”

“Why, so have I been thinking too, Rick,” said my guardian, “and our little woman likewise; she and I have been talking of it this very day. I dare say her husband won’t object. What do you think?”

Richard smiled and lifted up his arm to touch him as he stood behind the head of the couch.

“I say nothing of Ada,” said Richard, “but I think of her, and have thought of her very much. Look at her! See her here, sir, bending over this pillow when she has so much need to rest upon it herself, my dear love, my poor girl!”

He clasped her in his arms, and none of us spoke. He gradually released her, and she looked upon us, and looked up to heaven, and moved her lips.

“When I get down to Bleak House,” said Richard, “I shall have much to

tell you, sir, and you will have much to show me. You will go, won't you?"

"Undoubtedly, dear Rick."

"Thank you; like you, like you," said Richard. "But it's all like you. They have been telling me how you planned it and how you remembered all Esther's familiar tastes and ways. It will be like coming to the old Bleak House again."

"And you will come there too, I hope, Rick. I am a solitary man now, you know, and it will be a charity to come to me. A charity to come to me, my love!" he repeated to Ada as he gently passed his hand over her golden hair and put a lock of it to his lips. (I think he vowed within himself to cherish her if she were left alone.)

"It was a troubled dream?" said Richard, clasping both my guardian's hands eagerly.

"Nothing more, Rick; nothing more."

"And you, being a good man, can pass it as such, and forgive and pity the dreamer, and be lenient and encouraging when he wakes?"

"Indeed I can. What am I but another dreamer, Rick?"

"I will begin the world!" said Richard with a light in his eyes.

My husband drew a little nearer towards Ada, and I saw him solemnly lift up his hand to warn my guardian.

"When shall I go from this place to that pleasant country where the old times are, where I shall have strength to tell what Ada has been to me, where I shall be able to recall my many faults and blindnesses, where I shall prepare myself to be a guide to my unborn child?" said Richard. "When shall I go?"

"Dear Rick, when you are strong enough," returned my guardian.

"Ada, my darling!"

He sought to raise himself a little. Allan raised him so that she could hold him on her bosom, which was what he wanted.

"I have done you many wrongs, my own. I have fallen like a poor stray shadow on your way, I have married you to poverty and trouble, I have scattered your means to the winds. You will forgive me all this, my Ada, before I begin the world?"

A smile irradiated his face as she bent to kiss him. He slowly laid his face down upon her bosom, drew his arms closer round her neck, and with one parting sob began the world. Not this world, oh, not this! The world

that sets this right.

When all was still, at a late hour, poor crazed Miss Flite came weeping to me and told me she had given her birds their liberty.

CHAPTER LXVI

Down in Lincolnshire

THERE IS A HUSH upon Chesney Wold in these altered days, as there is upon a portion of the family history. The story goes that Sir Leicester paid some who could have spoken out to hold their peace; but it is a lame story, feebly whispering and creeping about, and any brighter spark of life it shows soon dies away. It is known for certain that the handsome Lady Dedlock lies in the mausoleum in the park, where the trees arch darkly overhead, and the owl is heard at night making the woods ring; but whence she was brought home to be laid among the echoes of that solitary place, or how she died, is all mystery. Some of her old friends, principally to be found among the peachy-cheeked charmers with the skeleton throats, did once occasionally say, as they toyed in a ghastly manner with large fans—like charmers reduced to flirting with grim death, after losing all their other beaux—did once occasionally say, when the world assembled together, that they wondered the ashes of the Dedlocks, entombed in the mausoleum, never rose against the profanation of her company. But the dead-and-gone Dedlocks take it very calmly and have never been known to object.

Up from among the fern in the hollow, and winding by the bridle-road among the trees, comes sometimes to this lonely spot the sound of horses' hoofs. Then may be seen Sir Leicester—invalided, bent, and almost blind, but of worthy presence yet—riding with a stalwart man beside him, constant to his bridle-rein. When they come to a certain spot before the mausoleum-door, Sir Leicester's accustomed horse stops of his own accord, and Sir Leicester, pulling off his hat, is still for a few moments before they ride away.

War rages yet with the audacious Boythorn, though at uncertain intervals, and now hotly, and now coolly, flickering like an unsteady fire. The truth is said to be that when Sir Leicester came down to Lincolnshire for good, Mr. Boythorn showed a manifest desire to abandon his right of way and do whatever Sir Leicester would, which Sir Leicester, conceiving

to be a condescension to his illness or misfortune, took in such high dudgeon, and was so magnificently aggrieved by, that Mr. Boythorn found himself under the necessity of committing a flagrant trespass to restore his neighbour to himself. Similarly, Mr. Boythorn continues to post tremendous placards on the disputed thoroughfare and (with his bird upon his head) to hold forth vehemently against Sir Leicester in the sanctuary of his own home; similarly, also, he defies him as of old in the little church by testifying a bland unconsciousness of his existence. But it is whispered that when he is most ferocious towards his old foe, he is really most considerate, and that Sir Leicester, in the dignity of being implacable, little supposes how much he is humoured. As little does he think how near together he and his antagonist have suffered in the fortunes of two sisters, and his antagonist, who knows it now, is not the man to tell him. So the quarrel goes on to the satisfaction of both.

In one of the lodges of the park—that lodge within sight of the house where, once upon a time, when the waters were out down in Lincolnshire, my Lady used to see the keeper's child—the stalwart man, the trooper formerly, is housed. Some relics of his old calling hang upon the walls, and these it is the chosen recreation of a little lame man about the stable-yard to keep gleaming bright. A busy little man he always is, in the polishing at harness-house doors, of stirrup-irons, bits, curb-chains, harness bosses, anything in the way of a stable-yard that will take a polish, leading a life of friction. A shaggy little damaged man, withal, not unlike an old dog of some mongrel breed, who has been considerably knocked about. He answers to the name of Phil.

A goodly sight it is to see the grand old housekeeper (harder of hearing now) going to church on the arm of her son and to observe—which few do, for the house is scant of company in these times—the relations of both towards Sir Leicester, and his towards them. They have visitors in the high summer weather, when a grey cloak and umbrella, unknown to Chesney Wold at other periods, are seen among the leaves; when two young ladies are occasionally found gambolling in sequestered saw-pits and such nooks of the park; and when the smoke of two pipes wreathes away into the fragrant evening air from the trooper's door. Then is a fife heard trolling within the lodge on the inspiring topic of the "British Grenadiers"; and as the evening closes in, a gruff inflexible voice is heard to say, while two men

pace together up and down, “But I never own to it before the old girl. Discipline must be maintained.”

The greater part of the house is shut up, and it is a show-house no longer; yet Sir Leicester holds his shrunken state in the long drawing-room for all that, and reposes in his old place before my Lady’s picture. Closed in by night with broad screens, and illumined only in that part, the light of the drawing-room seems gradually contracting and dwindling until it shall be no more. A little more, in truth, and it will be all extinguished for Sir Leicester; and the damp door in the mausoleum which shuts so tight, and looks so obdurate, will have opened and received him.

Volumnia, growing with the flight of time pinker as to the red in her face, and yellower as to the white, reads to Sir Leicester in the long evenings and is driven to various artifices to conceal her yawns, of which the chief and most efficacious is the insertion of the pearl necklace between her rosy lips. Long-winded treatises on the Buffy and Boodle question, showing how Buffy is immaculate and Boodle villainous, and how the country is lost by being all Boodle and no Buffy, or saved by being all Buffy and no Boodle (it must be one of the two, and cannot be anything else), are the staple of her reading. Sir Leicester is not particular what it is and does not appear to follow it very closely, further than that he always comes broad awake the moment Volumnia ventures to leave off, and sonorously repeating her last words, begs with some displeasure to know if she finds herself fatigued. However, Volumnia, in the course of her bird-like hopping about and pecking at papers, has alighted on a memorandum concerning herself in the event of “anything happening” to her kinsman, which is handsome compensation for an extensive course of reading and holds even the dragon Boredom at bay.

The cousins generally are rather shy of Chesney Wold in its dullness, but take to it a little in the shooting season, when guns are heard in the plantations, and a few scattered beaters and keepers wait at the old places of appointment for low-spirited twos and threes of cousins. The debilitated cousin, more debilitated by the dreariness of the place, gets into a fearful state of depression, groaning under penitential sofa-pillows in his gunless hours and protesting that such fernal old jail’s—nough t’sew fler up—frever.

The only great occasions for Volumnia in this changed aspect of the

place in Lincolnshire are those occasions, rare and widely separated, when something is to be done for the county or the country in the way of gracing a public ball. Then, indeed, does the tuckered sylph come out in fairy form and proceed with joy under cousinly escort to the exhausted old assembly-room, fourteen heavy miles off, which, during three hundred and sixty-four days and nights of every ordinary year, is a kind of antipodean lumber-room full of old chairs and tables upside down. Then, indeed, does she captivate all hearts by her condescension, by her girlish vivacity, and by her skipping about as in the days when the hideous old general with the mouth too full of teeth had not cut one of them at two guineas each. Then does she twirl and twine, a pastoral nymph of good family, through the mazes of the dance. Then do the swains appear with tea, with lemonade, with sandwiches, with homage. Then is she kind and cruel, stately and unassuming, various, beautifully wilful. Then is there a singular kind of parallel between her and the little glass chandeliers of another age embellishing that assembly-room, which, with their meagre stems, their spare little drops, their disappointing knobs where no drops are, their bare little stalks from which knobs and drops have both departed, and their little feeble prismatic twinkling, all seem Volumnias.

For the rest, Lincolnshire life to Volumnia is a vast blank of overgrown house looking out upon trees, sighing, wringing their hands, bowing their heads, and casting their tears upon the window-panes in monotonous depressions. A labyrinth of grandeur, less the property of an old family of human beings and their ghostly likenesses than of an old family of echoings and thunderings which start out of their hundred graves at every sound and go resounding through the building. A waste of unused passages and staircases in which to drop a comb upon a bedroom floor at night is to send a stealthy footfall on an errand through the house. A place where few people care to go about alone, where a maid screams if an ash drops from the fire, takes to crying at all times and seasons, becomes the victim of a low disorder of the spirits, and gives warning and departs.

Thus Chesney Wold. With so much of itself abandoned to darkness and vacancy; with so little change under the summer shining or the wintry lowering; so sombre and motionless always—no flag flying now by day, no rows of lights sparkling by night; with no family to come and go, no visitors to be the souls of pale cold shapes of rooms, no stir of life about it—passion

and pride, even to the stranger’s eye, have died away from the place in Lincolnshire and yielded it to dull repose.

CHAPTER LXVII

The Close of Esther’s Narrative

FULL SEVEN HAPPY YEARS I have been the mistress of Bleak House. The few words that I have to add to what I have written are soon penned; then I and the unknown friend to whom I write will part for ever. Not without much dear remembrance on my side. Not without some, I hope, on his or hers.

They gave my darling into my arms, and through many weeks I never left her. The little child who was to have done so much was born before the turf was planted on its father’s grave. It was a boy; and I, my husband, and my guardian gave him his father’s name.

The help that my dear counted on did come to her, though it came, in the eternal wisdom, for another purpose. Though to bless and restore his mother, not his father, was the errand of this baby, its power was mighty to do it. When I saw the strength of the weak little hand and how its touch could heal my darling’s heart and raised hope within her, I felt a new sense of the goodness and the tenderness of God.

They throve, and by degrees I saw my dear girl pass into my country garden and walk there with her infant in her arms. I was married then. I was the happiest of the happy.

It was at this time that my guardian joined us and asked Ada when she would come home.

“Both houses are your home, my dear,” said he, “but the older Bleak House claims priority. When you and my boy are strong enough to do it, come and take possession of your home.”

Ada called him “her dearest cousin, John.” But he said, no, it must be guardian now. He was her guardian henceforth, and the boy’s; and he had an old association with the name. So she called him guardian, and has called him guardian ever since. The children know him by no other name. I say the children; I have two little daughters.

It is difficult to believe that Charley (round-eyed still, and not at all grammatical) is married to a miller in our neighbourhood; yet so it is; and

even now, looking up from my desk as I write early in the morning at my summer window, I see the very mill beginning to go round. I hope the miller will not spoil Charley; but he is very fond of her, and Charley is rather vain of such a match, for he is well to do and was in great request. So far as my small maid is concerned, I might suppose time to have stood for seven years as still as the mill did half an hour ago, since little Emma, Charley's sister, is exactly what Charley used to be. As to Tom, Charley's brother, I am really afraid to say what he did at school in ciphering, but I think it was decimals. He is apprenticed to the miller, whatever it was, and is a good bashful fellow, always falling in love with somebody and being ashamed of it.

Caddy Jellyby passed her very last holidays with us and was a dearer creature than ever, perpetually dancing in and out of the house with the children as if she had never given a dancing-lesson in her life. Caddy keeps her own little carriage now instead of hiring one, and lives full two miles further westward than Newman Street. She works very hard, her husband (an excellent one) being lame and able to do very little. Still, she is more than contented and does all she has to do with all her heart. Mr. Jellyby spends his evenings at her new house with his head against the wall as he used to do in her old one. I have heard that Mrs. Jellyby was understood to suffer great mortification from her daughter's ignoble marriage and pursuits, but I hope she got over it in time. She has been disappointed in Borrioboola-Gha, which turned out a failure in consequence of the king of Borrioboola wanting to sell everybody—who survived the climate—for rum, but she has taken up with the rights of women to sit in Parliament, and Caddy tells me it is a mission involving more correspondence than the old one. I had almost forgotten Caddy's poor little girl. She is not such a mite now, but she is deaf and dumb. I believe there never was a better mother than Caddy, who learns, in her scanty intervals of leisure, innumerable deaf and dumb arts to soften the affliction of her child.

As if I were never to have done with Caddy, I am reminded here of Peepy and old Mr. Turveydrop. Peepy is in the Custom House, and doing extremely well. Old Mr. Turveydrop, very apoplectic, still exhibits his deportment about town, still enjoys himself in the old manner, is still believed in in the old way. He is constant in his patronage of Peepy and is understood to have bequeathed him a favourite French clock in his

dressing-room—which is not his property.

With the first money we saved at home, we added to our pretty house by throwing out a little growlery expressly for my guardian, which we inaugurated with great splendour the next time he came down to see us. I try to write all this lightly, because my heart is full in drawing to an end, but when I write of him, my tears will have their way.

I never look at him but I hear our poor dear Richard calling him a good man. To Ada and her pretty boy, he is the fondest father; to me he is what he has ever been, and what name can I give to that? He is my husband's best and dearest friend, he is our children's darling, he is the object of our deepest love and veneration. Yet while I feel towards him as if he were a superior being, I am so familiar with him and so easy with him that I almost wonder at myself. I have never lost my old names, nor has he lost his; nor do I ever, when he is with us, sit in any other place than in my old chair at his side, Dame Trot, Dame Durden, Little Woman—all just the same as ever; and I answer, "Yes, dear guardian!" just the same.

I have never known the wind to be in the east for a single moment since the day when he took me to the porch to read the name. I remarked to him once that the wind seemed never in the east now, and he said, no, truly; it had finally departed from that quarter on that very day.

I think my darling girl is more beautiful than ever. The sorrow that has been in her face—for it is not there now—seems to have purified even its innocent expression and to have given it a diviner quality. Sometimes when I raise my eyes and see her in the black dress that she still wears, teaching my Richard, I feel—it is difficult to express—as if it were so good to know that she remembers her dear Esther in her prayers.

I call him my Richard! But he says that he has two mamas, and I am one.

We are not rich in the bank, but we have always prospered, and we have quite enough. I never walk out with my husband but I hear the people bless him. I never go into a house of any degree but I hear his praises or see them in grateful eyes. I never lie down at night but I know that in the course of that day he has alleviated pain and soothed some fellow-creature in the time of need. I know that from the beds of those who were past recovery, thanks have often, often gone up, in the last hour, for his patient ministration. Is not this to be rich?

The people even praise me as the doctor's wife. The people even like me

as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed. I owe it all to him, my love, my pride! They like me for his sake, as I do everything I do in life for his sake.

A night or two ago, after bustling about preparing for my darling and my guardian and little Richard, who are coming to-morrow, I was sitting out in the porch of all places, that dearly memorable porch, when Allan came home. So he said, “My precious little woman, what are you doing here?” And I said, “The moon is shining so brightly, Allan, and the night is so delicious, that I have been sitting here thinking.”

“What have you been thinking about, my dear?” said Allan then.

“How curious you are!” said I. “I am almost ashamed to tell you, but I will. I have been thinking about my old looks—such as they were.”

“And what have you been thinking about THEM, my busy bee?” said Allan.

“I have been thinking that I thought it was impossible that you COULD have loved me any better, even if I had retained them.”

“‘Such as they were’?” said Allan, laughing.

“Such as they were, of course.”

“My dear Dame Durden,” said Allan, drawing my arm through his, “do you ever look in the glass?”

“You know I do; you see me do it.”

“And don’t you know that you are prettier than you ever were?”

“I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now. But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen, and that they can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing—.”

About the Author

An international celebrity during his lifetime, Charles Dickens (1812–1870) is widely regarded as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. His classic works include *A Christmas Carol*, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, one of the bestselling novels of all time. When Dickens was twelve years old, his father was sent to debtors' prison, and the boy was forced to work in a boot-blacking factory to support his family. The experience greatly shaped both his fiction and his tireless advocacy for children's rights and social reform.

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